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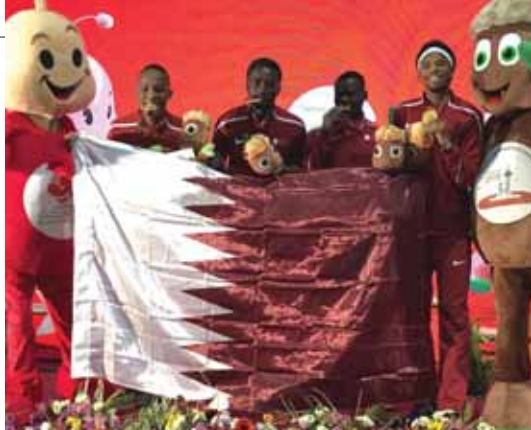
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Qatar district cooling industry seeks to build on high growth: OBG

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Qatar power to 4x400 relay gold in Tehran



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In brief

QATAR | Visit
Sierra Leone president arrives in Doha today

Sierra Leone President Ernest Bai Koroma will arrive in Doha today for an official visit to Qatar. His Highness the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the Sierra Leone leader will hold talks tomorrow, at the Emiri Diwan, on bilateral relations and ways to boost them, in addition to a number of issues of mutual interest.

QATAR | Phone Talk
Qatar-UK military relations discussed

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah held yesterday a telephone talk with UK Secretary of Defence Gavin Williamson. During the phone call, they discussed bilateral relations in the military and defence fields, and means of developing them. Dr al-Attiyah briefed the UK secretary of defence on the results of the first US-Qatari Strategic Dialogue held in Washington last week.

QATAR | Reaction
Blast near tax office in Ankara condemned

Qatar expressed yesterday its strong denouncement and condemnation of an explosion that targeted a tax office in Turkish capital Ankara. The Foreign Ministry said in a statement yesterday that it fully backed the Turkish government in all the measures it will take to maintain security and stability. The statement also reiterated Qatar's firm position of rejecting violence and terrorism regardless of its motives.

QATAR | Infrastructure
Ashghal opens Bani Hajer underpass

The Public Works Authority, Ashghal, announced that it had opened Bani Hajer underpass as part of Khalifa Avenue. The 362m-long underpass with two lanes in each direction connects with 428m-long section of Al Rayyan Al Jadeed Street, and 210 metre-long section of Al Shahama Street, and will accommodate up to 4,000 vehicles per hour. **Page 5**

ARAB WORLD | Conflict
Russia pilot killed after jet downed over Syria
 A Russian pilot was killed yesterday in fighting with Islamists after his warplane was downed over northwest Syria, Russia's defence ministry and a monitor said. **Page 10**

FM meets Haley



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani with the Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations Nikki Haley in New York. The meeting reviewed issues of mutual interest and the latest regional and international developments. It also reviewed the illegal measures taken against Qatar, their grave consequences for regional and international security and peace and their impact on human rights. HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations Sheikhha Alia Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani attended the meeting.

Doha and Charleston in deal to promote ties

QNA
 Washington

Doha and the US city of Charleston have signed a declaration of understanding under which the two cities will promote relations in the economic and cultural development domains.

The signing of the agreement took place during the official visit of HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani to Charleston

in South Carolina. The aim of the visit was to enhance co-operation and common interests.

The agreement aims to explore new areas of economic development and new trade opportunities in both public and private sectors, and support the exchange of experiences in planning, construction, health, education and environmental issues such as waste recycling and co-operation in greening and beautification as well as projects between the two cities, in addition to supporting exchanges of visits between of-

ficials and citizens to explore new areas of interest.

The declaration was signed by HE Qatar's ambassador to the US Sheikh Meshal bin Hamad al-Thani and Mayor of Charleston John Tecklenburg.

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister said this week witnessed the launch of a historic strategic dialogue between the US and Qatar aimed at highlighting the opportunities that benefit the peoples of the two countries, which are at the heart of the two countries' long and solid relationship. **To Page 4**



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani with Governor of South Carolina Henry McMaster, HE Qatar's ambassador to the US Sheikh Meshal bin Hamad al-Thani, HE the CEO of Qatar Investment Authority Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohamed bin Saud al-Thani and CEO of Qatar Airways Group Akbar al-Baker.

British MPs urge May to strive to end Qatar siege

QNA
 London

A total of 15 members of parliament (MPs) signed yesterday a petition demanding UK Prime Minister Theresa May to strive for an immediate lifting of the siege against Qatar and encourage the countries blockading the country to respond to Kuwaiti mediation efforts aimed at resolving the crisis.

A UK parliamentary delegation which visited Doha during September 27-29 last year called on the British government to compel the siege countries to lift their blockade of Qatar and respond to Kuwaiti mediation efforts. While submitting their conclusions regarding the visit to Doha, they urged Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson to persuade his counterparts in the siege countries to ease measures taken against Qatar in order to put an end to the human rights violations resulting from eight months of the siege.

Four Arab countries, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt, triggered the Gulf crisis by cutting their ties with Qatar on June 5, 2017. They also imposed a blockade of Qatar.

The parliamentary delegation included MPs from the House of Lords and the House of Commons, led by

Labour Party member Grahame Morris. They met during their visit to Qatar with a number of the victims and listened to their statements. They also visited a number of ministries such as the Awqaf and Islamic Affairs to listen first hand to witness statements on the Saudi authorities' prevention of Qatari citizens and residents from performing Haj and Umrah.

Their report included a number of recommendations, including calling on the British government to coerce the blockading countries for lifting the siege and encourage the siege countries to engage in dialogue through Kuwaiti mediation.

The report and the petition came as a fitting reward to the efforts of the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), which has been working hard to highlight the violations of the siege countries since the beginning of the crisis. President of NHRC Dr Ali bin Smaikh al-Marri visited the UK three times since the beginning of the crisis and held two hearing sessions with British MPs.

He also met with human rights officials at the UK Foreign Office. He also met with Salil Shetty, Secretary-General of Amnesty International, which is headquartered in London, as well as the International Federation of Journalists.

QNB 'most valuable' brand in ME, Africa

QNB Group was recognised once again as the most valuable banking brand in the Middle East and Africa region with brand value worth \$4.2bn, according to The Banker's 2018 Brand Finance Global 500 report.

Qatar's QNB is the largest financial institution in the Middle East and Africa.

QNB's brand value has grown to \$4.2bn compared to \$3.8bn in 2017, an 11% year-on-year increase, while the Group's Brand Strength Index (BSI) has increased from 76.4 out of 100 to 78.4 out of 100, driven by its constant strong financial performance and growing international expansion.

QNB also marked a new and significant milestone in support of its vision to become a leading bank in the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia by 2020, ranking second most valuable banking brand in Southeast Asia (SEA) ahead of major banks in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, and Singapore.

The group also maintained its AA+ brand strength rating, making it the strongest banking brand in the region and could rank higher in the future as it continues to build its customer base and reinforce its brand.

QNB is also the only Qatari brand to be among the top 100 banking brands in the world.

One-third of all cancers preventable, says expert

An expert at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) has said that more than a third of all cancers can be prevented through lifestyle changes.

HMC is joining healthcare organisations across the globe to mark World Cancer Day, held annually on February 4.

"With more than a third of all cancers being preventable through lifestyle changes, we call on individuals to take responsibility for reducing their own cancer risk. Simple measures such as stopping smoking, eating less red and processed meat, and exercising regularly can lead to a longer and healthier life, and must be seen as the first line of defence against cancer and other associated non-communicable diseases," said Dr Usama al-Homsi, senior consultant, Oncology Department at National Centre for Cancer Care and Research (NCCCR).

Cancer research indicates that exercise and eating healthily can reduce the risk of being diagnosed with cancer. An unhealthy diet and lack of physical activity are two key factors that can increase a person's risk of being diagnosed with cancer. This risk can, however, be reduced through implementing simple steps such as taking a brisk 30-minute walk every day and eating in moderation.

In recognition of World Cancer Day, NCCCR, with support from the Qatar Cancer Society, has organised a public awareness event today. The event, which will be held in the main lobby of NCCCR from 8am to 1pm, will feature educational activities for patients, visitors, and staff. Members of the cancer care team will provide health advice and educate visitors about the signs and symptoms of the disease and the importance of early detection and pre-

ventive measures such as good nutrition and physical activity.

According to statistics released by the Qatar National Cancer Registry a total of 1,466 new cancer cases were diagnosed in 2015. Breast cancer was the most common cancer among females (39.41%), and prostate cancer was most common among males (11.96%), followed by colorectal cancer. Cancer is now the second leading cause of death in Qatar, accounting for 18% of all fatalities, compared to 10% in 2010.

HE Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari, Minister of Public Health, said: "Cancer is a serious disease affecting the health and well-being of many people both in Qatar and worldwide. This year's World Cancer Day activities build on the progress we have already made over the past few years to raise awareness amongst the public

about how they can take ownership of their health to reduce their risk of cancer."

HE Dr al-Kuwari said: "The elimination of the most common cancers in the population of Qatar is a priority. Through research, education, support, and awareness, there have been substantial changes in the way cancer is identified, diagnosed, and treated in the country. With access to high-quality cancer services and the provision of dedicated, specialised care, the cancer treatment landscape continues to improve with more cases being diagnosed earlier and survival rates continuing to improve."

Professor Alexander Knuth, medical director and chief executive officer of the NCCCR, said: "World Cancer Day represents a great opportunity for us to reflect on what we have done in the past, what we are doing now,



HE Dr Hanan Mohamed al-Kuwari



Professor Alexander Knuth

and what we are planning to do in the future to reduce the impact of this devastating disease. It is also an opportunity to educate people more effectively about the facts of cancer and reinforce the message that prevention

and early detection can save lives." Under the campaign theme, 'We can. I can,' World Cancer Day aims to draw attention to what can be done to prevent millions of avoidable deaths as a result of cancer. **Page 4**

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2 | Gulf Times

Sunday, February 4, 2018

QATAR

FM meets UN secretary-general

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani has met the Secretary-General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres in New York. They discussed means of enhancing co-operation between Qatar and the United Nations in areas of mutual interest, and reviewed the latest regional and international developments. HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister briefed the UN secretary-general on the illegal measures taken against Qatar by the siege countries, their grave consequences for regional and international security and peace and their impact on human rights. He referred to the recent report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights which described the measures taken by the siege countries as arbitrary and affecting human rights. He praised the great role played by UN organisations in the establishment of public rights and justice and stability. During the meeting, HE Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani also reviewed the messages of Qatar which alerted the Security Council and the UN secretary-general to violations of Qatar's airspace by the UAE. The meeting was attended by HE the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations, Sheikhia Alia Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani.

Sudanese governor praises Qatari support for economy

QNA

Khartoum

Governor of River Nile state Major General Hatim al-Waseela stressed yesterday that the generous Qatari support to the state in many fields helped establish a strong infrastructure that will provide a boost to the economy. The total number of countries investing in the state was now more than 28, he said.

Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), Major General Hatim al-Waseela said that the state managed to improve its economic position thanks to the strong support and co-operation from Qatar. Al-Waseela expressed his appreciation for the major role the State of Qatar is playing in achieving economic stability in the Nile state and in the country. Qatar undertook developmental projects worth \$210mn to establish electricity stations and to support agricultural development as well as industries such as cement, among others. He noted that electricity has reached the city of Abo Hamad for the first time and lit 63 villages. He added that the Qatari support has helped an unprecedented boom in terms of providing electricity that can go uninterrupted for the next 50 years. The governor of the River Nile state said that there were other projects carried out by Qatar in the state to open a village for orphans worth \$12mn, and eight water stations worth QR10mn. There was also a Qatari project for renovating artefacts with a total investment of \$140mn. Hasad Qatar has also implemented a project to improve the agricultural productivity and enhance food security of the Arab World. He stressed that the role of Qatar was not just limited to establishing peace in Darfur, but in helping the economy recover across the country.

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Foreign Minister holds meetings in New York



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani has met ambassador Francois Delattre, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, and ambassador Jonathan Allen, Charge d'Affaires of the United Kingdom to the United Nations in New York. HE Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani also held separate meetings with the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya, and the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations Ma Zhaoxu in New York. During the meetings, issues of common interest, regional and international developments, as well as the illegal measures taken against Qatar and its grave consequences for regional and international security and peace and its impact on human rights were reviewed. The meetings were attended by Ambassador Sheikha Alia Ahmed bin Saif al-Thani, Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations.



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Dr. Arthur Hengerer

Past Chair, Federation of State Medical Boards, USA

Building Resilience and Coping Skills

Dr. Javaid Sheikh

Dean, Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar, Doha, Qatar

Lifestyle Medicine: Differences that Matter

Dr. Wayne Dysinger

CEO, Lifestyle Medicine Solutions, USA

Mythbusters: Debunking the Most Common Nutritional Myths

Mr. Stephan Herzog

Executive Director, American and International Boards
of Lifestyle Medicine, USA

Media Literacy:

A 21st Century Approach to Wellness

Ms. Julie Smith

Professor, School of Communication, Webster
University, USA

Student Health Challenges

Dr. Ravinder Mamtani

Senior Associate Dean for Population Health, Capacity
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Doha, US city Charleston sign deal to promote ties

From Page 1

“Despite the thousands of miles between us, South Carolina shares many similarities with the State of Qatar, but more importantly, we invest in human capital and create jobs that will benefit the American and Qatari people, and this what pushes the political and economical commitment that I am happy that I’m involved in strengthening it.”

“As one of the oldest and most important ports on the east coast of the United States, Charleston has long cherished its international relations,” said Tecklenburg.

“With this declaration, we announce our intention to forge deeper and stronger relationships with the people of Doha-Qatar and we look forward to the future which our two cities will share.”

The Governor of South Carolina, Henry McMaster, hosted a



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani witnessing the signing of a declaration of understanding between the city of Charleston and the city of Doha, under which the two cities will promote joint relations in the economic and cultural development domains.

dinner in honour of the delegation of the State of Qatar attended by a number of business and community leaders. HE Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani held a roundtable with a number of senior politicians and business lead-

ers from the state to discuss ways to enhance co-operation.

His Excellency also toured the Boeing’s facility in Charleston. During the tour, he was accompanied by CEO of Qatar Airways Group Akbar al-Baker, and HE

the CEO of Qatar Investment Authority Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohamed bin Saud al-Thani.

Prior to the visit, the State of Qatar and the United States of America held the Qatar-US Strategic Dialogue.



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani touring the assembly site for Boeing’s commercial airplanes division, in North Charleston, South Carolina. During the tour, he was accompanied by CEO of Qatar Airways Group Akbar al-Baker, and HE the CEO of Qatar Investment Authority Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohamed bin Saud al-Thani.

MEC issues guidelines for getting vendor licences

The Ministry of Economy and Commerce (MEC) has announced new opportunities and guidelines for the licensing of push carts and street vendors, as part of its efforts to further support the private sector.

The initiative is also aimed at deriving the maximum benefit from Decision No 243 of HE the Minister of Economy and Commerce on the regulations and conditions of licences for practising the activities of a street vendor, the MEC said in a statement yesterday.

The ministry has specified two categories of push carts within this initiative. The first are mobile push carts, which can be moved constantly to provide services at various places, and has no permanent location. The cart operator should leave a space of at least 20m from other sellers or carts.

The other type of carts are the fixed ones, drawn by another vehicle to the targeted location for providing various services. The MEC has specified the dimensions of these carts at around 2m in length and a maximum of 1.5m in width.

The ministry noted that the commercial activities for which push carts are allowed include selling goods, offering services and practising skilled works, in addition to selling cold/hot food and beverages as well as selling fruits, vegetables and canned products.

The MEC also stressed that in the pres-



Image used for representative purpose only.

ence of more than one worker employed by the same entity, each worker should get a separate licence.

To get the licence for push carts and street vendors, the ministry said the application requirements include submit-

ting a good conduct certificate and a health certificate, and obtaining the approval of the employer (a company or a person). In case of fixed carts, the approval of the relevant entities concerned must be obtained.

To get a licence to practise a single activity at a specified location for push carts, it must not obstruct traffic movement or be parked on main streets or near the intersections. Besides, other conditions and standards particular to the specified activity should be satisfied as well.

Carts, utensils and tools used by the vendors should comply with environmental and health standards, and street vendors should present their ID cards and commercial registration whenever demanded by the authorities concerned, the statement explains. Any loss of ID should be reported immediately.

The MEC said the IDs should be handed over to the MEC as soon as the licence expires or is cancelled. It added that such carts should be located away from gates of schools, mosques, hospitals and the other places designated by the ministry.

Other general instructions say the applicants should be aware of business management and the design of the cart should be suitable for the targeted surroundings, offering diverse and innovative products and services that suit the country’s urban development.

Qatar marks World Cancer Day today

Qatar joins the observance of World Cancer Day under the World Health Organisation (WHO) theme ‘We Can – I Can’ and marked annually on February 4.

The Qatar National Cancer Registry has published its annual report, which helps researchers and decision-makers in the country understand the exact size and burden of cancer in Qatar. It also contributes significantly to correct planning based on accurate and documented data.

According to the report in 2015, 1,466 cases of cancer were newly diagnosed, with 43% females and 57% males. The most common was breast cancer followed by colorectal cancer and then the prostate. For Qataris, breast cancer was the most common followed by colorectal cancer and then uterus. Among children up to the age of 14 years old, leukaemia followed by brain cancer was the most common. With regard to mortality, the report shows that nearly 20% of deaths occurred among breast cancer patients followed by lung and colorectal cancer.

The report contains more than 60 indicators that cover information on cancer pa-


tients, both citizens and residents, including adults and children.

The report shows that the incidence of cancer in Qatar comes within the global rates of most countries.

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) is highlighting the importance of collaborative working across the pathway of care for those with a cancer diagnosis to ensure timely access for investigation and treatment and to ensure continuity of care between providers.

The cancer burden can be reduced through partnerships between MoPH, the Primary Health Care Corporation, Hamad Medical Corporation, Sidra Medicine, private providers and other stakeholders. Partnerships play a valuable role in the sharing of knowledge and experience to drive impact and make changes.

In addition, the National Cancer Programme is working in partnership with the Public Health Department to highlight the need to create healthy environments in schools and workplaces and for individuals to make healthy lifestyle choices. These messages are reflected through the ‘Start Now’ campaign which is being led by the public health team.



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Imprisonment of Jazeera journalist ‘arbitrary’: UN

A UN body has ruled the detention of an Al Jazeera journalist held by Egyptian authorities for more than one year as “arbitrary”.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) also demanded the immediate release of Mahmoud Hussein, an Egyptian native who worked for Al Jazeera Arabic.

The 55-year old was arrested in December 2016 after travelling from Doha, where he was based, to Cairo to visit his family. OHCHR issued its report based on a petition submitted by the Washington, DC-based Robert F Kennedy Human Rights. “Hussein’s arbitrary detention is far from an isolated case; the Egyptian authorities’ tactic of using in-

definite pre-trial detention to restrain those who dare to act independently is a cornerstone of its repression of the press, civil society, and protesters,” said the rights group, in a statement posted to its website.

“The [OHCHR] Working Group’s decision in Hussein’s case is an important step in holding the Egyptian government accountable for

these widespread human rights violations.”

Hussein was accused of “incitement against state institutions and broadcasting false news with the aim of spreading chaos”, allegations he, his lawyers and Al Jazeera strongly deny.

Hussein, who has been held in the notorious Tora maximum-security prison and suffers from physical

and severe psychological duress, has not been officially charged.

The OHCHR report said that there is “no legal basis in Egyptian law” for Hussein’s continued pre-trial detention.

Furthermore, authorities have “failed to produce a single piece of evidence that could justify any of the charges informally brought against him.”

Qatar to attend Kuwait trade fair

Qatar is taking part the 17th Trade Fair of OIC Member States (TFOIC - Special Edition), held under the sponsorship of the emir of Kuwait, from February 6 to 10 in Kuwait City. TFOIC is being organised by Kuwait’s Ministry of Commerce and Industry in co-operation with the Islamic Center for Development of Trade, and coincides with the second Kuwait International Trading Fair. The fair will be inaugurated by the Kuwaiti Minister of Commerce and Industry in the presence of a number of Arab and Islamic countries’ ambassadors. The Qatar pavilion at the fair will include the participation of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce, Qatar Chamber, Qatar Financial Centre, Economic Zones Company (Manateq) and 13 companies from the Qatari private sector.



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Health for Life

Underpass linking Bani Hajer with Rayyan opens to traffic

The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has announced the opening of the Bani Hajer Underpass as part of the Bani Hajer Interchange on the Khalifa Avenue project.

The 362m-long underpass with two lanes in each direction connects with a 428m-long section of Al Rayyan Al Jadeed Street and 210m-long section of Al Shahama Street, and will accommodate up to 4,000 vehicles per hour, Ashghal has said in a press statement.

The Bani Hajer underpass will be a key access point in the area, largely serving residents of Bani Hajer and Al Rayyan, as it will connect Al Shahama Street in Bani Hajer with Al Rayyan Al Jadeed Street in Al Rayyan, the statement explains.

Road users travelling from Al Shahama Street can now enjoy direct access via the free-flowing underpass to Al Rayyan Al Jadeed Street and Al Rayyan and vice-versa.

The opening was held in the presence of senior officials from Ashghal and the General Directorate of Traffic. Among those present were Ashghal director of Infrastructure Affairs Mohamed Masoud al-Marri, and Captain Nasser Ghalib al-Dusari, from Patrol Section at the General Directorate of Traffic, along with a number of engineers and senior staff from Ashghal.

As part of the delivery, Ashghal has installed all necessary utility works, including drainage systems as well as lights and signage, to ensure the safety of road users.

Al-Marri said the opening of



Ashghal and Directorate of Traffic officials at the opening of the Bani Hajer underpass.

the Bani Hajer underpass would improve traffic flow in the area, especially after removing the diversion that was used to make U-turns for traffic coming to and from Bani Hajer and Al Rayyan, noting that road users would be able to go straight through the underpass.

The new underpass is part of the Bani Hajer Interchange reconstruction, which upon completion in March will be a key feeder connecting traffic Doha, Dukhan, Bani Hajer and Al Rayyan.

Al-Marri said the Bani Hajer interchange consists of three levels with four underpasses,

two loops, two link bridges and a right-turn road linking traffic coming from Dukhan towards Al Rayyan.

Captain al-Dusari stressed that the underpass will serve residents in the areas of Bani Hajer and Al Rayyan as it connects Al Shahama Street with Al Rayyan Al Jadeed Street, providing easy traffic movement in both directions.

Ashghal had earlier opened a 3.1km-long section of the Khalifa Avenue main carriageway (full length on completion will be 7.3km) spanning from the west of Tilted Interchange to the east

of Bani Hajer Interchange.

The opening has alleviated traffic congestion on the main road and the local approaches in Al Gharafa and Bani Hajer and improved traffic movement for the residents there, the statement adds.

Ashghal also opened Al Wajbah Bridge after upgrading the old bridge from two lanes into three lanes, allowing for better traffic flow.

A first in Qatar, an "innovatively designed roundabout" has also been opened: the main road - which is the straight section for traffic on Khalifa Avenue



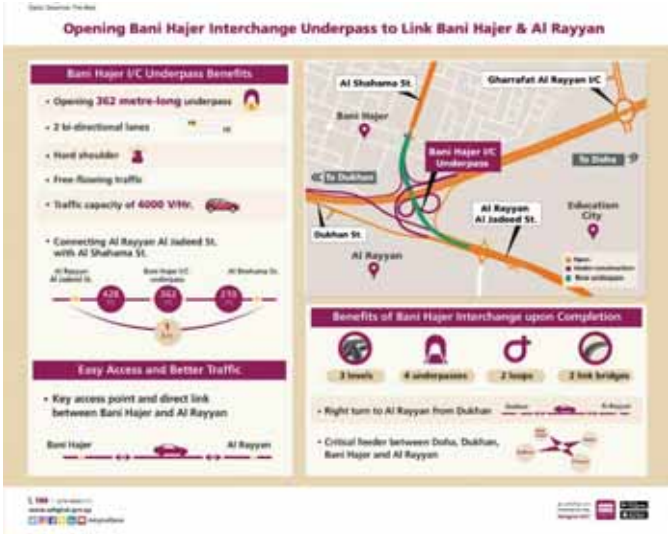
A view of the newly opened bridge at Bani Hajer.

- goes through the centre of the signalised roundabout.

The interchange links north Gharafat al-Rayyan Street, south Qatar Foundation and west and east Al Luqta Street.

The Khalifa Avenue project runs from the Al Wajbah Palace Interchange (west) to the Tilted Interchange (east) and along Al Gharafa Road from Al Rayyan Street (south) to Thani bin Jasim Street (north).

The project works include the construction of approximately 11.6km of dual carriageway with four lanes in each direction replacing a three-lane way besides seven major free-flowing interchanges, service roads and auxiliary lanes along sections of the road.







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Stafford Sri Lankan School Doha
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A Happy Independence Day!







70th Independence Day





UDC opens 8 'points of use' facilities for workers at The Pearl

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Eight 'points of use' facilities located throughout The Pearl-Qatar were inaugurated recently for the benefit of United Development Company's (UDC's) foreign workers and contractors.

HE the Minister of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs Dr Issa Saad al-Jafali al-Nuaimi, along with UDC chairman Turki bin Mohamed al-Khater and president and CEO Ibrahim al-Othman, inaugurated the facilities.

In line with the Qatar government's efforts to ensure the well-being of workers involved in development projects in the country, UDC, master developer of The Pearl-Qatar, said it has invested QR12mn in the service points, inclusive of land and construction costs, "to ensure

that workers are treated with civility and class".

On the occasion, al-Khater and al-Othman accompanied the minister on a tour of the facilities.

Speaking to reporters at the launch, UDC's commercial executive director Abdulrahim al-Ibrahim said more than 3,000 labourers working in open areas will benefit from this initiative.

"This is to serve workers across the board, those who maintain and do the landscaping, cleaning and other undertakings on the island. These (service) points are well distributed and workers can rest, dine and take a time off during the day," he noted.

An integral component of The Pearl-Qatar community, al-Ibrahim added that these air-conditioned facilities have been designed and built to enhance the quality of life of workers.

Each facility, which has been built to the highest international standards, occupies a parcel area

of 160sqm and features a kitchen, dining area, toilets, showers and lockers, as well as a storage area for equipment and tools.

Workers can rest, eat, wash and keep their equipment free of charge in these eight centres, which are conspicuously located on the island.

"We are giving these Wi-Fi-enabled venues but the food and water will be the responsibility of the contractors," al-Ibrahim said. "At least 300 workers at a time can be accommodated."

He noted that workers in the towers are excluded as these properties have their own facility management.

Al-Ibrahim also cited the increasing occupancy rate at their properties due to the opening of new towers across the island.

"We are focusing on the people residing in Qatar at this time," he said. "In terms of selling our properties, we are reaching out to all markets, not only

local and regional but also the international market."

Since The Pearl-Qatar's inception, he noted that it already has 53 nationalities as investors. Meanwhile, construction of a hospital and school is progressing.

UDC has also started selling properties as part of Phase 1 and 2 of its iconic tower Al Muta'ida, while other phases will be released soon.



HE the Minister of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs Dr Issa Saad al-Jafali al-Nuaimi, along with UDC chairman Turki bin Mohamed al-Khater and president and CEO Ibrahim al-Othman, led the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the inauguration of the eight 'Points of Use' facilities for workers at The Pearl-Qatar. UDC-supplied picture



HE Dr Issa Saad al-Jafali al-Nuaimi, Turki bin Mohamed al-Khater and Ibrahim al-Othman join workers at the newly-opened service facility. PICTURE: Nasar TK

Rayyan launches new brand identity

Rayyan Natural Water has announced that it has officially revealed its new brand identity, supported by a nationwide campaign, focusing on the natural source that makes Rayyan water "unique from other local water bottlers".

"This is a pivotal moment in Rayyan's history as we enhance our brand identity to reflect our unique natural quality and elevate its status among bottled water in Qatar," said Khalifa Khalid al-Rabban, chairman of Rayyan Natural Water and subsidiaries. "We are very proud to introduce our new look and trust it will be positively received by consumers as well."

Rayyan Natural Water is described as Qatar's only



New-look water bottles.

natural water producer.

Developed in conjunction with Y&R Doha, the new logo signifies the natural purity that has been Rayyan's key differentiator for nearly 35 years, the statement notes. Rayyan Natural Water is fresh, natural water bottled at its

source from an organic aquifer deep below the desert surface in Qatar. To help tell this story, Rayyan collaborated with Doha advertising agency 60 Degrees in developing the creative concept that illustrates this natural source and serves as the focal point for the

nationwide campaign.

"As a local agency, 60 Degrees is understandably proud of adding the renowned local brand, Rayyan, to our client portfolio. Our team has put in a tremendous amount of work in helping re-position the brand through the new identity and are proud to be a key part in telling Rayyan's narrative as the only natural water in Qatar," said Roula Ayoub, 60 Degrees general manager.

In a statement, Rayyan Natural Water "continues to be resilient despite the current blockade, producing over 1mn bottles of fresh water per day and is a major contributor to local government initiatives to ensure local water security".

Qanat Qarnevale Festival concludes

The Qanat Qarnevale Festival, held at The Pearl-Qatar from January 31, concluded yesterday after four days of art, music, shopping and entertainment staged to emulate the Carnival of Venice. "The festival has delighted its great audience, including children and families, residents and

visitors alike, with various activities, such as game booths, retail kiosks, arcade games, laser shows, water taxi rides, 3D floor painting, graffiti and caricature arts, outdoor cinema and stage performances, among others," United Development Company, master developer of The Pearl-Qatar, said in a state-

ment. Qanat Quartier is a "unique residential area at The Pearl-Qatar, known for its magnificent architecture, greenery, beach, canals, pedestrian-friendly squares, plazas and Venetian-like experience where residents can enjoy its fine-dining restaurants and luxurious shops", the statement adds.

CONDOLENCES

The Editor-in-Chief,
Management and Staff of
GULF TIMES
extend their heartfelt condolences to
Kamran Rehmat
(Community Editor)
on the death of his Mother



Bushra Rehmat

on 2nd February 2018, in Islamabad, Pakistan

May Allah give fortitude to the bereaved family to bear this great loss.

HMC workshop underscores link between dietary choices and disease prevention

More than 120 specialists from Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) attended a workshop organised by the Department of Clinical Nutrition for nutritionists on the Qatar Dietary Guidelines, introduced to provide the public with parameters for healthy eating and physical activity.

Reem al-Saadi, director of the Department of Dietetics and Nutrition at HMC, said the workshop was organised as part of the completion of the work plan to implement the Qatar Dietary Guidelines.

The Guidelines were introduced by the Ministry of Public Health in 2015 and ever since, the ministry has held a number of training workshops for nutrition specialists from various hospitals in the country, including staff from HMC.

Sahar al-Shammari, a therapeutic dietitian with HMC's Department of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery, reviewed the Guideline's main recommendations at the workshop. They include eating a diet with foods from the six food groups, maintaining a healthy weight, limiting the intake of sugar, salt, and fat, being physically active, drinking plenty of water, and adopting safe and clean food preparation



More than 120 specialists from HMC attended the workshop.



Officials of HMC's Department of Clinical Nutrition.

methods. She also discussed the importance of breast-feeding for at least the first six months of a child's life.

Ayman Alawneh, a senior clinical dietitian with

HMC's Department of Dietetics and Nutrition, a panellist at the workshop, said the Guidelines have put a focus on the link between healthy eating and

disease prevention.

He said dietary choices play an important role in the prevention and management of non-communicable chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer.

He said the Guidelines provide members of the public with information on the foods that should be eaten, avoided, and limited. They also provide other tips such as increasing one's intake of legumes and other plant-based foods and eating fish twice a week.

Hayam al-Hajjaji, a dietitian at HMC's Paediatrics Department, also stressed the importance of eating a diet rich in plant-based foods such as vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds.

She said that many research studies support eating a whole food, plant-based diet as a strategy to prevent cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some cancers.

While meat and fish contribute to a healthy diet, she said moderation is key and mentioned the importance of making healthy choices such as selecting whole wheat bread and grains in place of white bread, white rice, and pasta made from white flour.

AAB launches all-new Toyota Camry

Setting new standards for the mid-size sedan segment in design, performance and comfort, Abdullah Abdulghani & Bros Co (AAB) has launched the all-new 2018 Toyota Camry in Qatar.

AAB, exclusive distributor of Toyota and Lexus vehicles in Qatar, noted that the design of the eighth-generation Camry aims to test the limits of performance and intelligence, infusing the high-end sedan with a refined feel.

The design team began with a blank slate, using Toyota New Global Architecture as the basis for the all-new platform, units, electronics and other core components.

The result is a striking emotional character, stunningly beautiful design, responsive driving and premium ride performance, according to a press statement.

“To create something that stirs people’s soul, we have laid out the concept of a new sedan that provides fun and excitement behind the wheel,” said the chief engineer of the all-new Camry, Masato Katsumata.

“In developing the next-generation Toyota Camry, we were able to start with a blank slate, which allowed us to create a true driver’s car that behaves exactly as the driver intends,” he noted. “The all-new 2018 Camry is an extremely balanced machine



AAB and Toyota officials at the Camry launch ceremony in Doha. **PICTURES:** Ram Chand

with much more excitement and emotion than any previous model.

Yugo Miyamoto, chief representative, Middle East and North Africa Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, said: “We are excited to launch the all-new Camry and build on the success the car already enjoys in the region.”

“With its exhilarating design, refined interior, stirring driving performance, cutting-edge technology, and class-leading fuel efficiency, the 2018 Camry

creates a whole new value proposition while ensuring seamless fun and excitement for driver and passengers alike and re-establish itself as the new standard in the mid-size sedan category,” he explained.

“We extend our deepest gratitude to our customers in the region for their continued support and feedback, which inspire us to excel and develop cars that exceed their expectations,” Miyamoto said.

The Camry has established an unshakeable presence in the

standard mid-size sedan market – both in the Middle East and globally – with total sales surpassing 19mn units.

The all-new Camry provides a comfortable and stable ride with superior handling characteristics, thanks to TNGA, which represents an entirely new strategy to the way the company designs, engineers, and packages its vehicles.

TNGA retains all of Toyota’s traditional values of superlative build quality and safety while injecting a fun driving

experience that plays on all the senses.

The physical manifestation is the usage of a new engine, transmission, and the GA-K platform.

Set to become a new sensation among the region’s aspiring car enthusiasts, the all-new Camry comes with three powertrain options: a 2.5-litre four-cylinder engine that produces 178hp and 23.6kg-m of torque and mated with a six-speed automatic transmission, and a newly-developed 3.5-litre V6 with D-4S fuel injection system that pro-



The all-new 2018 Camry.

duces 298hp and 36.3kg-m of torque and mated with an eight-speed automatic transmission.

In addition, a new electrified hybrid system will be introduced later this year, combining two power sources consisting of a petrol engine and two electric motors, producing 176hp and 118hp, respectively, and delivering 22.5kg-m and 20.6kg-m of torque, respectively.

With an interior featuring a distinctive design, and offering convenience and comfort with a layer of luxury, the car’s cabin

is accentuated with a range of advanced features.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the all-new Camry, which includes a comprehensive array of safety features to protect its occupants, such as six SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control, Anti-lock Braking System, Electronic Brake Force Distribution, Brake Assist, Hill-start Assist Control and an enhanced body structure and platform structure.

The car is available in nine exterior colours.

Biryani Festival at Hotel Park - Sheraton Doha from February 7

Foodies and food adventurers are in for a treat as skilled restaurateurs and chefs from the South Asian region will converge for the Biryani Festival, scheduled to take place at the Hotel Park - Sheraton in Doha from February 7 to 10, it was announced yesterday. The four-day event, described as the “first of its kind” in Qatar, will be held from 5pm to 9pm daily, the organisers have said in a press statement. More than 45 exhibitors will be showcasing their skills as over 100

types of biryani, including Mughlai, Lucknow gosht, Kashmiri vegetable, mussels, prawns, hara macchi, egg, harkmas (beef), Malabar chicken, Mattanjery chicken, Kayikka’s beef, Thalassery mutton, the traditional Afghani and Irani, and others will be on offer during the festival. The event is being organised by ‘Four and One. “Hosting this event is part of our strategic plans of partnering with Qatar Tourism Authority in maximising the tourism potentials in Qatar,” Four and One

Group partner Omran al-Sherawi said. The family-oriented event is partnered by Talabat, Zamatoe, Urban Point and QTouch Media and Events. Four and One Group CEO Fernando De Guama added, “Coming on the heels of the successful hosting of the Chocolate, Tea and Coffee Festival, the Biryani Festival is another way to showcase the rich cultural diversity of the residents of Qatar.” The entry-free event will also feature celebrity oriental chefs, competitions, games and a kids’ play zone.

Al Khaliji fetes long-serving and outstanding employees

Al Khalij Commercial Bank (Al Khaliji) recently held its annual staff gathering in Doha.

The event, attended by Al Khaliji Group CEO Fahad al-Khalifa, honoured employees with gifts and certificates of recognition for completing over 10 years of service, as well as for their loyalty towards the bank and its customers. In addition, outstanding performances of 16 employees during 2017 were recognised at the event.

The gathering commemorated the numerous milestones Al Khaliji crossed in 2017, including the slew of awards and recognitions it garnered throughout the year, all of which owe to the staff’s commitment, dedication and exceptional performance. It also serves as a testament to the environment of innovation, creativity and teamwork that continues to be nurtured and fostered at Al Khaliji, the bank has said in a statement.

Al-Khalifa said, “Honouring a number of our senior employees is actually recognition of their great efforts throughout the previous period. It is as well an opportunity to confirm that human wealth and its retention is top on our priorities.

“Al Khaliji is proud to have such a vast pool of long-serving staff, which is a true testament to the relationship of trust and loyalty that we share with our employees. These

awards are our way of saying thank you to our employees and recognising the outstanding contribution they have made to our organisation over the years.”

The annual staff gathering is also an auspicious occasion to celebrate Al Khaliji’s 2017 awards, which included Qatar’s ‘Best Corporate Bank’, ‘Best Premium Bank’ as well as ‘Best Commercial Bank in Qatar’ by the Banker Middle East Industry Awards.



Al Khaliji officials and the awardees.

Sky Jewellery unveils 17 designs

Sky Jewellery has announced the launch of 17 designs to celebrate the season of love.

“It’s full of ‘love expressions’ everywhere. And Sky Jewellery once again leads

the season with its concepts, a range of products as well as offers for everyone who wants to gift his/her loved one with a perfect value-for-money piece of jewellery,” the jeweller

said in a press statement.

The designs are available at prices ranging from QR599 to QR1,299, the statement notes.

“Every Valentine diamond pendant is to be ac-

companied by a free gold chain. As such, Valentine’s Day is all the more exciting and rewarding with Sky Jewellery,” said Babu John, managing director, Sky Jewellery.

DIFI holds panel discussion on ‘supporting families hit by conflicts’

The Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), a member of Qatar Foundation, recently held a panel discussion on ‘Supporting Families Affected by Wars and Conflicts: Experiences of NGOs in Qatar’, at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York.

The event was organised in collaboration with Qatar Red Crescent Society, Qatar Charity, Education Above All and the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the UN.

Evidence shows that the cumulative impact of wars and violent conflict aggravates economies and weakens the ability of the state, local authorities, or private sectors in providing services and opportunities of livelihood for families and their members. The DIFI event shed light on the critical role of non-governmental organisations in providing the necessary support and

assistance to families and their members affected by wars and conflicts. The discussion sought to highlight and present the experiences of NGOs in Qatar in providing support to populations affected by wars and conflicts.


The event began with opening remarks from HE Sheikha Alya al-Thani, Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations, followed by introductory remarks from Noor al-Malki al-Jehani, executive director of DIFI. The panel discussed humanitarian aid and poverty alleviation from the experience and insights of QRCS, represented by Dr Mohamed bin Ghanim al-Ali al-Maadheed, chairman of the board; and Qatar Charity, represented by Mohamed bin Ali al-Ghamdi, executive director.

The panel also highlighted the experience and insights of Education Above All, represented by Salwa al-

Mannai, head of policy and research, in providing education to war affected children.

Al-Ghamdi said, “We are delighted to be present at international events, such as the United Nations, as it is in line with our work of interacting with humanitarian issues and participating in decision-making. We view our partnerships with other national organisations as very important to raising and discussing issues of concern to the family and to strengthening and combating poverty and achieving the permanent empowerment of poor families.”

DIFI is a global policy and advocacy institute working to advance knowledge on Arab families, through research and the promotion of evidence-based policies at a national, regional, and international level. The institute has special consultative status with United Nations Economic and Social Council.



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All interested Tenderers / Contractors should submit their Prequalification Documents comprising of the following at the Office of FCD at Sailiyah Camp:

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2. Company Prequalification Documents inclusive of the following:
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 - b) List of Completed Projects including issued Completion Certificate and On-going Projects + List of Company Owned Equipments

Supporting Qatar Heritage and Culture is a key pillar in Almana Group’s Vision

Supporting the Qatari Culture and Heritage is a key pillar in the vision of Almana Group, who is proud to sponsor the Fifth edition of Bretha Heritage Competition for Hawk Hunting.

The competition took place from 21 till 29 December 2017 under the patronage of HE Sheikh Abdallah Bin Naser Bin Khalifah Al Thani and the participation of 1200 hawk hunting contestant. Almana Group was a main sponsor in this event and it has offered a Ram 1500 for the winner who has received his prize in United Cars Almana Showroom.

“We are proud to support similar Heritage activities in Doha and we feel it is our duty to continue to upkeep the culture of Qatar and giving back to the society” Mr. Soud Al Mana Vice Chairman said.

“Ram 1500 is a brand known for heritage, power and durability and these are attributes that are very much linked to this type of sport. We felt it will be the perfect prize that we can offer to the winner who was very happy to claim it” he added.

“We at Almana group always believe being associated with the adventure as the Ram and Jeep brands are very synonymous and Bretha Heritage Hawk Competition was a perfect platform for Ram. Ram is known for exceptional off road capability and has best in class interiors” Mr. Srinivasan Vemparala – CEO of Al Mana group

The Ram 1500 was delivered to the winner Mr. Mohammed Abdullah A.A Almarri in the presence of Mr. Tarek Almana the Director of Finance -Almana Group, and the CEO of Almana Group, Mr. Srinivas Vemparala.

The Ram 1500 Rebel is now available in the United Cars Almana showroom, with a style that stands out and storage redefined with Ram Box Cargo Management System. The Ram Rebel is a rocket in the city, on the highway and on the sand.

Accept nothing less than both power and efficiency. With the Ram 1500 Rebel, you can choose to make your own path or take the long way around.

Capable of generating up to 395 horsepower



and 556 nm torque, the Ram 1500 Rebel is a powerhouse just waiting to be unleashed.

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The Ram 1500 Rebel is now available in the United Cars Almana showroom, with a style that stands out and storage redefined with Ram Box Cargo Management System. The Ram Rebel is a rocket in the city, on the highway and on the

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Syrian rebels down Russian plane, kill pilot

Reuters
Amman/Moscow

Syrian rebels shot down a Russian warplane yesterday and killed its pilot on the ground after he ejected from the plane, Russia's defence ministry and Syrian rebels said.

The incident took place in an area of Syria's northern Idlib province that has seen heavy air strikes and fighting on the ground between government forces backed by Russia and Iran, and rebels who oppose President Bashar al-Assad.

Syrians opposed to Assad see Russia as an invading force they blame for the deaths of thousands of civilians since Moscow joined the war on the side of the Syrian government in 2015.

The Russian plane was shot

down over the town of Khan al-Subl near the city of Saraqeb, close to a major highway where the Syrian army and Iranian-backed militias are trying to advance, a rebel source said.

Although the Russian pilot escaped the crash, he was killed by rebels who had tried to capture him, the source said. Russia's Defence Ministry said that the aircraft was downed by a portable surface-to-air missile.

The pilot reported that he had ejected by parachute, and he was later killed on the ground.

"The pilot died in a fight with terrorists," it said.

Tass news agency quoted the Russian Defence Ministry as saying Moscow retaliated with a strike from an undisclosed high-precision weapon that killed more than 30 militants in an area of Idlib province where the plane

was downed. The Syrian opposition had shown on social media what they said was the wreckage of the plane and the body of the pilot surrounded by rebels.

They said the downed warplane was one of the planes used to target civilian convoys fleeing along a major Syrian highway from villages that the army and foreign militias had overrun. Syria's civil war, which is now entering its eighth year, has killed hundreds of thousands of people and driven more than 11mn from their homes.

A Russian plane was blamed for the death of seven civilians and scores of injuries after cars were targeted on the highway, according to a witness and two rebels sources.

Syrian soldiers and other militiamen were now around



A picture taken yesterday shows a rebel fighter taking a picture of a downed Sukhoi-25 fighter jet in Syria's northwest province of Idlib.

twelve kilometres from Saraqeb, advancing towards the Damascus-Aleppo highway under cover of heavy Russian air strikes, two opposition sources said. At least five civilians were

killed in Saraqeb city yesterday, which residents blamed on Russian planes.

Syrians in rebel-held areas say they can distinguish between Russian warplanes and

those of the Syrian air force, because the Russian planes fly at higher altitude.

Residents say thousands of people have been forced by air strikes to flee the area, moving

further north to the safety of makeshift camps on the Syrian side of the Turkish border.

Russia's Defence Ministry regularly says it targets only hardline militants in Syria.

Two killed in Iran blast

QNA
Tehran

Two people have been killed and two others wounded in an explosion which occurred yesterday in a factory in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz.

IRNA news agency quoted an official at the fire extinguishing agency in Shiraz as saying that a "steam boiler" at a foam production plant in the industrial city of Shiraz had exploded, killing two workers and wounding two others.

The source added that the blast was caused by the use of a off-specification device in one of the plants, which caused destruction of the factory, with workers trapped under the rubble.

Seven Turkish soldiers die in offensive against militia

AFP
Ankara

Seven Turkish soldiers were killed yesterday in Turkey's offensive against Kurdish militia inside Syria, including five who died in a single attack on a tank, the army said.

The losses marked the highest toll in one day for the Turkish military in operation "Olive Branch", launched on January 20 against Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia seen by Ankara as a terror group.

The attack on the tank, details of which were not disclosed, was also the sin-

gle deadliest attack on the military of the offensive so far. The latest clashes brought to 14 the number of Turkish troops killed so far in operation.

The Turkish army and allied Ankara-backed Syrian rebel forces are seeking to oust the YPG from its western border stronghold of Afrin but the operation so far has been marked by fierce clashes.

The army said that one of the soldiers was killed in a clash and another on the border area, without giving further details.

In a later statement, it added a Turkish army tank had been hit in another at-

tack, killing all five servicemen inside. A previous statement said one serviceman was killed and another wounded in that attack.

In retaliation, Turkish war planes carried out air strikes on the area from where the attack was carried out, destroying shelters and munitions dumps, it added.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Thursday the Turkish army and Ankara-backed rebels had suffered 25 fatalities between them in the operation so far.

Meanwhile, seven civilians have been killed in mortar fire on the Turkish side of the border that Ankara blames on the YPG.

Ankara says Assad must go 'at some point'

AFP
Istanbul

Turkey yesterday said that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad should leave office "at some point" in the future but denied there was any kind of contact between Ankara and Damascus over ending the seven year civil war.

Ankara has been a prime foe of Assad throughout the conflict but has occasionally softened its rhetoric in the last months as Turkey strengthened co-operation with the regime's main ally Russia.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's spokesperson, Ibrahim Kalin, told journalists in Istanbul that Assad was not the leader to unite Syria and had lost legitimacy. But Kalin said there needed to be a "political transition in Syria", leading to a new constitution and elections.








"It is not going to be easy but that's the ultimate goal to reach and at some point Assad will have to

go," he added. "Where exactly, at what point precisely (Assad leaves), is something that will be answered as we go on, obviously," he said.

He was speaking after Russia on Tuesday hosted a peace congress on Syria, with both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Erdogan expressing "satisfaction", according to the Kremlin.

Kalin, who is also regarded as Erdogan's top foreign policy advisor, also indicated that Turkey believed Russia's priority was ensuring Syria did not become a failed state, rather than concern about Assad himself. He said the Russian position has been "not so much protecting Assad personally but protecting the state institutions, state apparatus and the Syrian army and the regime elements". He said: "They want to make sure that the state doesn't collapse completely in Syria."

Turkey's position on Assad has been under ever greater scrutiny since Ankara on January 20 began a cross-border operation with Syrian allied rebel forces against Kurdish militia based in the town of Afrin.

<div><div><div><div><div><div></div><div>دولة قطر</div></div><div><div></div><div>State of Qatar</div></div></div><div><div><div></div><div>وزارة المالية</div></div><div><div></div><div>مِنَارَةُ الْمَثَالِيَةِ</div></div></div><div><div>MINISTRY OF FINANCE</div></div></div></div><div>Tenders and Bids of Government Organizations subordinate to the Law of Organizing Tenders and Bids No.24 for the Year 2015</div></div>							
GOVERNMENT TENDERS			For More details please refer to the unified website of government procurement https://monaqasat.mof.gov.qa				
Logo	Organization	Tender Number	Description of the required goods, works or Services	Tender Fee	Tender Bond	Submission System	Closing Date
	Qatar General Electricity & Water Corporation - Kahramaa	GTC 877/2017	CALL-OFF CONTRACT FOR SITE INVESTIGATION AND SURVEY - GTC 877/2017 Kahramaa website (www.km.qa) Electricity Network Planning Department	QAR 12,000	QAR 1,200,000	Envelopes (Technical + Commercial)	08/03/2018
	Qatar General Electricity & Water Corporation - Kahramaa	LTC-1156/2016 (RE-FLOAT)	SUPPLY OF 10 KVA & 25 KVA PORTABLE DIESEL GENERATOR SETS Materials Department www.km.qa	QAR 500	QAR 11,000	Two Envelopes	25/02/2018
	Ministry of Public Health (MOPH)	174-2018	NATIONAL DIABETES STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT – PHASE 1 AND 2 - For more information : www.MOPH.gov.qa Announcement	QAR 1500	QAR 150,000	Two Envelopes	Sunday, 25th of February 2018 12:00 hrs
	Primary Health Care Corporation	PHCC/TAC/16/2018	SUPPLY OF INSULIN NEEDLES FOR A PERIOD OF THREE (3) YEARS ON CALL OFF BASIS	QAR 1,000	QAR 100,000	Two Envelope (Technical + Commercial)	Monday 12/03/2018
	Primary Health Care Corporation	PHCC/TAC/17/2018	SUPPLY, INSTALLATION AND COMMISSIONING OF GRP PANEL TYPE, PUF INSULATED FRP TANKS AND APPLICATION OF FRP LINING FOR EXISTING CONCRETE TANKS AS APPLICABLE AT PHCC HCS	QAR 5,000	QAR 500,000	Two Envelope (Technical + Commercial)	Tuesday 13/03/2018
	Qatar Museums Authority	QMA-2018-13	Supply, installation & Commissioning Maintenance & Inspection Tools	QAR 500	QAR 4000	Two Envelopes (Technical + Commercial)	25/02/2018
	Qatar Museums Authority	QMA-2018-14	Supply, Delivery and Installation of new Metal Litter Bin at MIA Park	QAR 500	QAR 4500	Two Envelopes (Technical + Commercial)	25/02/2018

Europe-bound migrants in Libya protest detention

AFP
Gharyan

Dozens of Sub-Saharan African migrants at a Libya detention centre got to their knees and crossed their wrists above their heads to protest their imprisonment. They staged their protest at the Al-Hamra shelter in Gharyan, 100 kilometres south of Tripoli, during a visit Friday by Mabruk Mohamed al-Targui, the tourism minister of Libya's fragile unity government. "This gesture is a call for freedom," said Saddam, from Sudan's Darfur region, who fears being forced to return to a homeland ravaged by war. "We have been in this detention centre four months," he said. "For more than a month no organisation has come to see us."

Most of the detainees are from of Chad, Somalia, Eritrea or Darfur. Many worked and saved for years before attempting the trip to Europe, leaving behind violence and insecurity at home. But Libya itself is far from safe. Rocked by lawlessness since the Nato-backed 2011 uprising that toppled and killed longtime dictator Muam-

mar Gaddafi, it has become a key transit country for illicit migration. Migrants take major risks passing through the North African country. In October, following weeks of deadly clashes around the western city of Sabratha, a major departure point for migrants attempting perilous sea voyages to Europe, more than 3,000 were arrested. Between 800 and 1,000 were transferred to the Al-Hamra centre, where they are crammed into 12 buildings intended for around 200 people. On Friday the centre organised a party with African music and dance to "help them forget their suffering", according to shelter director Colonel Al-Bahloul Shananah. He said the event also aimed to highlight "the need to intervene quickly and find solutions for these people". But he voiced scepticism over the migrants' protest. "They make this sign to indicate that they are detained," Shananah said. "But their presence...in the shelters is for a reason: they entered Libyan territory illegally." "These young Africans, if we open the doors to them, they will go back to sea," he added. "We will see new tragedies and thousands of deaths."

PLO to mull revoking recognition of Israel

AFP
Ramallah

The Palestine Liberation Organisation's top leadership opened the way to suspending its recognition of Israel yesterday, but stopped short of ordering the drastic measure immediately. Withdrawing the PLO's 1988 recognition would threaten decades of Israeli relations with the moderate Palestinian leadership and raise doubts over security co-ordination between the two. It would also be seen as a fatal blow to the two-state solution, following the White

House's December recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December. The PLO's Executive Committee released a statement after a three-hour meeting yesterday saying it would set up a committee to study the derecognition move. The organisation's top body was meeting for the first time since the Palestinian Central Council, called for the step last month. The executive committee yesterday urged the Palestinian Authority of President Mahmoud Abbas to "immediately start preparing plans and projects for disengagement steps with the Israeli occupation government."

Planes hit Hamas in Gaza

AFP
Gaza City

Israeli aircraft hit a Hamas compound in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday, after Palestinians there fired a rocket into the Jewish state, the Israeli army said. "In response to the projectile fired at southern Israel... fighter jets struck a Hamas compound composed of two military structures," the army statement said. A Palestinian security source said the raid hit a facility of Hamas' military wing west of Rafah in southern Gaza, "without causing injuries." Israeli army radio said that there were no casualties from Friday night's rocket, which it said fell on open ground in southern Israel. It was the second exchange in 24 hours, after the air force hit a Hamas position in Gaza early Friday in response to a rocket being fired from the Palestinian enclave the night before. Such rockets are usually fired not by Hamas, the group that controls the territory, but by fringe groups. Israel holds Hamas, with which it has fought three wars since 2008, responsible for any fire coming from Gaza.

Egypt unveils tomb of ancient priestess on Giza plateau

AFP
Cairo

Egyptian archaeologists yesterday unveiled the tomb of an Old Kingdom priestess adorned with well-preserved and rare wall paintings. Antiquities Minister Khaled al-Enany told reporters that the tomb on the Giza plateau near Cairo was built for Hetpet, a priestess to Hathor, the goddess of fertility, who assisted women in childbirth. The tomb was found during excavation work in Giza's western cemetery by a team of Egyptian archaeologists led by Mostafa Waziri, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. The antiquities ministry said the cemetery houses tombs of top officials from the Old Kingdom's Fifth Dynasty (2465-2323 BC), and that several have already been dug up since 1842. The newly discovered tomb "has the architectural style and the decorative elements of the Fifth Dynasty, with an entrance leading to an 'L' shaped shrine", the ministry said. "The tomb has very distinguished wall paintings in a very good conservation condition depicting Hetpet standing in



A guide from the Ministry of Antiquities stands inside the tomb of an Old Kingdom priestess adorned with well-preserved and rare wall paintings in Saqqara, on the Giza plateau on the southern outskirts of Cairo, that was unveiled yesterday.

different hunting and fishing scenes or...receiving offerings from her children," it said. The paintings also show scenes of musical and dancing performances as well as two scenes featuring monkeys - domestic animals at the time - one picking and eating fruit and the other dancing in front of an orchestra. Waziri said the paintings were unusual. "Such scenes are rare...and

have only been found previously in the (Old Kingdom) tomb of 'Ka-Iber' where a painting shows a monkey dancing in front of a guitarist not an orchestra," he said. That tomb is located in Saqqara, a necropolis about 20 kilometres south of Cairo. Enany told reporters the new tomb includes "a purification basin on which are engraved the name of the tomb's owner and her titles".

"A German expedition had found in 1909 a collection of antiquities carrying this lady's name, or a lady who has the same name, and these antiquities were moved to the Berlin museum at the time," he said. "And 109 years later, we find this tomb that carries Hetpet's name." Waziri said archaeologists will continue to excavate the site and hope to make new discoveries.

Ice and Snow Festival



People take part in the Kurdistan Ice and Snow Festival held at Kudu Mountain near the Iraq-Iran border Juman district, in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region of Iraq, yesterday.

Israel govt moves to 'legalise' rogue West Bank settlement

AFP
Jerusalem

The Israeli government is due today to discuss giving retroactive approval to a wildcat settlement in the occupied West Bank, where an Israeli rabbi was shot dead last month. The official agenda for today's weekly cabinet meeting says ministers will hear a motion to designate the 15-year-old Havat Gilad outpost as a "new community" which will have the neces-

sary building permits and a state budget. Rabbi Razieli Shevah was shot dead near Havat Gilad, where he lived, on January 9. The following week, Israeli troops searching for his attackers shot dead a Palestinian suspect in the city of Jenin in the northern West Bank, about 35 kilometres north of Havat Gilad. At Shevah's funeral there were calls for "revenge" during a speech by Education Minister Naftali Bennett of the far-right Jewish Home party. Bennett responded by saying

that the only revenge should be in building more settlements. Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman, sponsor of the forthcoming cabinet motion, spoke on Wednesday of getting official recognition for Havat Gilad. "We promised and the proposal to normalise Havat Gilad outpost as a regular community will be brought to the cabinet for approval this coming Sunday," Lieberman wrote on Twitter. According to his cabinet motion the outpost was founded in 2002 and currently houses about 40 families. Israeli settlements

are seen as illegal under international law and major obstacles to peace as they are built on land the Palestinians see as part of their future state. Israel however differentiates between settlements it has approved and those it has not. Those without approval are referred to as outposts and are typically populated by hardline religious nationalists who see the entire West Bank as part of Israel. Past attempts by Israeli authorities to dismantle Havat Gilad have led to clashes with settlers there. Israel has several

times given retroactive approval to outposts and last year work began on the first government-sanctioned settlement built in the Palestinian territories in some 25 years. Israel faced sharp criticism from the administration of former US president Barack Obama over settlement construction, but that has not been the case with Donald Trump's White House and Israeli officials have sought to take advantage. European nations and the UN maintain their strong opposition to settlement building.

Iraq launches huge operation against remaining IS militants

DPA
Ramadi

Iraq has announced the start of a massive operation in the western province of Anbar aimed at clearing the desert area of Islamic State militants. The US-backed offensive comes less than two months after Iraq declared that Islamic State had been routed in the country. "The operation aims at destroying hideouts of Daesh in the Anbar desert along the Iraqi-Saudi border," Major General Mahmoud al-Falahi said yesterday, using an Arabic acronym for Islamic State. Government forces and tribal fighters supported by a US-led air alliance are participating in the operation, he added in a statement. Dozens of explosives and vehicles were seized in suspected Islamic State pockets in the early hours of the crackdown, military officials said, without further details. Islamic State took large swathes of Iraqi territory in a 2014 blitz and has since claimed responsibility for a series of deadly attacks there. In December, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi an-

nounced that Iraq has "completely liberated" all of its territory that was under Islamic State. **Dozens of explosives and vehicles were seized in suspected Islamic State pockets in the early hours of the crackdown, military officials said, without further details** Al-Abadi said in remarks published on Saturday that despite Islamic State's rout in Iraq, there are still some cells linked to the radical group in the country. "Iraqi forces strike at these cells either by targeting them directly or using precise intelligence to follow up, in order to track down their elements, especially in remote desert areas," he told Egypt's state-run newspaper *Al-Ahram*. Al-Abadi added that a top priority for his government was to rehabilitate areas that were previously controlled by Islamic State extremists. An estimated 2.6mn Iraqis were displaced from their home towns as a result of Islamic State's incursion and their subsequent atrocities.

Third Kenyan leader arrested in crackdown

AFP
Nairobi

Kenyan police yesterday briefly detained another key government critic over his alleged involvement in the recent mock inauguration of opposition leader Raila Odinga as the “people’s president”, the third such arrest within four days.

Police said they arrested George Aladwa at his home yesterday morning, before releasing him several hours later after questioning.

Aladwa is accused of helping to organise the January 30 symbolic swearing-in in Nairobi in front of tens of thousands of supporters, in a fresh challenge to President Uhuru Kenyatta’s re-election last year.

Police said Aladwa, who was arrested at his home yesterday morning, was also being questioned over his role in a shooting Wednesday at the home of Odinga’s running-mate, Kalonzo Musyoka.

“Aladwa is being investigated over what happened at Kalonzo’s home. He is also being questioned over the chaos in (Nairobi) where he mobilised youths,” police spokesman Charles Owino told AFP.

Kenyatta’s victory in a re-run vote in October has sparked deadly clashes and polarised the country.

The government has denounced Odinga for trying to “overthrow” Kenyatta, while the opposition claims the election process was rigged and the result illegitimate.

At least 92 people have died in recent months, with most protesters killed at the hands of security forces, according to rights groups.

Aladwa’s detention follows the separate arrests this week of opposition firebrand Miguna Miguna and of lawyer TJ Kajwang for their alleged key roles in Odinga’s swearing-in.

The government also blocked three major TV channels to stop them from broadcasting the Tuesday’s “swearing-in”.

The stations remained off air yesterday despite a court order issued on Thursday to end the suspensions.

Police have also ignored a judge’s ruling to release Miguna ahead of his court appearance scheduled tomorrow.

“Tension is building up and it is just a matter of time before it explodes,” the *Daily Nation* newspaper wrote in an editorial yesterday.

“It is absurd that Mr Odinga and his coalition members have chosen the path of confrontation...but the government’s reaction is equally revolting,” according to the paper.

The United Nations and the US have denounced the Kenyan government’s crackdown.

But Odinga’s inauguration has also alienated him from the international community, with Western diplomats saying they were not in contact with him.

International calls for dialogue between the two sides have for months been ignored by both the government and opposition.

Farewell parade



French President Emmanuel Macron and Senegalese President Macky Sall wave to the crowd from a car in Saint-Louis yesterday on the final day of Macron’s visit to Senegal.

Sierra Leone says relations with IMF ‘normal’ after suspended payout

Reuters
Freetown

Sierra Leone’s finance minister has played down a decision by the IMF to delay a disbursement because of the West African country’s failure to improve revenue collection, saying the fund would return in May to discuss the programme.

The IMF said on a statement on its website last week it had delayed its disbursement of the second tranche of programme financing “due to a weak budget revenue outlook, where measures that were to be taken under the programme to increase revenue did not yield”.

“The IMF is currently working with the government to identify appropri-

ate corrective measures,” it said on its website.

Finance Minister Momodu Kargbo told Reuters: “There is no suspension of any support to Sierra Leone”, and that the next tranche of its \$224mn 5-year programme would be discussed in May when officials from the fund visit Freetown, after a presidential election on March 7.

“Relations between Sierra Leone and the IMF are very normal,” he said.

Both the IMF statement and the minister’s comments followed a story in *Africa Confidential*, a London-based publication, which cited a leaked US diplomatic cable reporting that President Ernest Bai Koroma’s government had had its IMF funding suspended because of foot-dragging on reforms such as taxing luxury car

imports, and removing subsidies on fuel and rice.

“Two issues are on the table: to float the price of fuel and impose the levy on rice...By the time of the second review those decisions should be taken,” Kargbo said.

Any reforms that spike the cost of fuel or rice, a basic staple in Sierra Leone, would not be popular with the poor ahead of the election to replace Koroma, who cannot run again but is backing his former foreign minister Samura Kamara as successor.

Sierra Leone depends on exports of diamonds and iron ore for revenue.

After recovering from civil war ending in 2002, it saw explosive growth early in this decade, but its economy was then battered by an Ebola epidemic and falling commodity prices.

Chinese-constructed expressway divides Uganda as debts mount

By Elias Biryabarema, Reuters
Kampala

Traffic will soar above the muddy swamp between Uganda’s capital and its international airport when a new Chinese-built highway opens in a few months time, but the road itself is mired in controversy.

The government has partly funded the 51km \$580mn expressway with a loan, part of \$11bn in borrowings in the decade since the World Bank cancelled debts about a third that size as part of debt relief for poor states.

Uganda says the four-lane road is the jewel in the crown of an infrastructure programme that will boost economic growth; critics accuse President Yoweri Museveni, in power for 32 years, of squandering debt relief and mortgaging much-anticipated oil revenues before crude starts to flow in 2020.

China alone has loaned the east African nation nearly \$3bn and is in talks for \$2.3bn more as part of its vast overseas development Belt and Road scheme.

“Uganda will grind to a halt as a country because of Museveni’s reckless borrowing. We’re like a patient on life support,” said opposition lawmaker Ibrahim Ssemujju Nganda, alluding to a debt warning from the central bank last year.

The government says the criticism is misplaced.

“We’re not borrowing for consumption and luxury, we are investing,” said Finance Ministry spokesman Jim Mugunga.

“The heightened borrowing is deliberate, it’s to put up modern infrastructure and push up economic growth.”

Uganda’s first expressway should trim the two-hour trip between the capital and international airport to 30 minutes.

Begun in 2012, construction should end in May, missing the initial target by a year.

But it is the price, rather than the de-

lays, that has alarmed Uganda’s auditor general, John Muwanga.

In a 2015 report, he noted the new road’s cost per lane per kilometre was double Ethiopia’s six-lane Addis-Adama Expressway, a road built by the same company – the China Communications Construction Co Ltd – with more features like underpasses and link roads.

“The project costs could have been much lower if the contractor had been procured through competitive bidding,” said the report.

The company did not respond to queries and the Chinese embassy in Kampala was not immediately available for comment.

Patrick Muleme, head of design at state-run Uganda National Roads Authority, said single-sourcing was a requirement for China providing a \$350mn Exim bank loan for the road.

Muleme said challenges like a 1.6km bridge over a vast swamp had driven up the cost.

“When you just see two projects and you compare costs it’s misleading because it doesn’t take into account the peculiarities and the unique features,” he said.

Other differences included variations in cost of materials, topography and land tenure systems, he said.

The auditor general’s report compared only the costs of construction between the two roads, not including \$100mn Uganda spent on acquiring the land.

Fred Muhumuza, a lecturer at Makerere University who helped carry out initial economic studies for the road, said the price was “insane”.

The expressway is designed as a self-financing toll road, but Muhumuza said there is not enough traffic to Entebbe, a staid, colonial-era lakeside town, that will pay tolls to avoid the more circuitous route.

The Uganda National Roads Authority said charges have not yet been determined.

Slowing exports, declining agricul-

tural output and bureaucratic dysfunction have all taken a toll on Uganda, along with what critics say is rampant corruption.

Economic growth slowed to 3.9% in the latest financial year from 4.8% the year before.

This year, the central bank projects 5% growth, still below the 7% needed to absorb new entrants to the job market in the youthful nation of 29mn.

Twelve years after the World Bank forgave \$3.5bn, nearly all Uganda’s debt, external debt is now at \$11.2bn, according to figures from the central bank.

“Uganda’s debt may be moving from a level of low to moderate risk of distress,” the bank warned last year.

Ratings agency Moody’s said in August that Uganda faced “deteriorating debt affordability, in part due to growth in non-concessional borrowing.”

The warning followed Moody’s downgrade of Uganda’s long-term debt eight months earlier.

In the 2018/19 budget, interest repayments – at 17.3% – will consume the largest chunk of domestic revenues.

The climbing repayments come as public hospitals suffer shortages of basic drugs and supplies.

Teachers, doctors and other public servants have gone on strike over low and unpaid salaries.

Other mega-projects funded by Chinese loans include two new hydro-power dams on the River Nile worth about \$2bn and a \$325mn expansion of Entebbe Airport.

Talks are ongoing to fund a railway at \$2.3bn.

Auditor General Muwanga has said one of the two dams under construction used “poor quality of concrete” and had “cracks in some sections”.

Yusuf Masaba, spokesman for ministry of energy and minerals, said any problems had been identified and corrected.

He said, “cracks or any minor defects do not mean that we’re not getting value for money”.

Awareness drive



A DanChurchAid NGO (DCA) staff member shows an information poster during an explosives awareness workshop in the Fatima 1 neighbourhood of the 3rd district of Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic. DCA conducts arms and explosives awareness workshops in the country. Since 2013 and the fall of former president Francois Bozize, armed clashes between neighbourhoods have regularly occurred in the capital, increasing the exposure of the civilian population to weapons and explosives.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, MIHAELA ELENA CARAGIA
holder of

Romania Passport No. 055372956
QID No. 28064200195

hereby change my name

from
MIHAELA ELENA CARAGIA

to
MIHAELA ELENA MAHFOUFI

Any objection, please contact
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

ANNOUNCEMENT

I, MAGADALENA MADADSEK PANGOG
holder of

Philippine Passport No. EB7052843
QID No. 28060823033

hereby change my name

from
MAGADALENA MADADSEK PANGOG

to
MAGDALENA MADADSEK PANGOG

Any objection, please contact
THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE FOR NATIONALITY AFFAIRS
within 15 days from the publication of this notice.

Police ‘kidnap’ Catholic priest in DR Congo: witnesses

AFP
Kinshasa

Police yesterday “kidnapped” a Catholic priest after mass in Kinshasa, witnesses said, amid spiralling tensions between the church and the DR Congo’s government over the president’s refusal to step down.

“Father Sebastien was taken away by police just after morning mass,” a nun of the Saint-Robert parish told AFP in N’sele on the eastern outskirts of the capital.

A police vehicle drew up outside the church, officers jumped out and “started to beat the priest,” said another nun who had also witnessed the incident.

“They threw him in the jeep and drove off with him,” she said, adding that an unidentified man “filmed the priest” on his mobile phone during mass.

Police refused to comment on the incident when contacted by AFP.

Priest Sebastien Yebo has worked for the parish since August 2017.

The incident comes after a deadly crackdown by the government on Catholic-organised protests against President Joseph Kabila.

At least 15 people have been killed in clashes with security forces at rallies on December 31 and January 21, according to the UN peacekeeping mission MONUSCO.

Kabila, 46, has been in power since 2001, at the helm of a regime widely

criticised for corruption, repression and incompetence.

His constitutional term in office expired in December 2016 but he has stayed on, stoking a bloody spiral of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Under a deal brokered by the powerful Catholic Church, he was allowed to stay in office provided new elections were held in 2017. The authorities then postponed the election until December 23 this year, citing what they said were logistical problems in preparing for the vote.

The delay, coupled with the mounting violence, has placed Kabila on collision course with the church, which has a prominent role in the DR Congo due to its educational and social care work.

US, Mexico play up their increased security ties

AFP
Mexico City

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson insisted Friday the US and Mexico are bolstering co-operation in the fight against drug trafficking, brushing aside concerns about the impact of his boss Donald Trump's anti-Mexican barbs.

The US-Mexican relationship has been strained by Trump's attacks on Mexican immigrants and the North American Free Trade Agreement – and his insistence on building a border wall.

Critics say he is jeopardising the US relationship with an ally and neighbour whose cooperation Washington needs on a range of issues, including security.

But as Tillerson kicked off his first major tour of Latin America, he and his Mexican counterpart sought to play down any tensions, focusing instead on fighting what the former oilman turned secretary of state called the “devastating impact” of the international narcotics trade.

“We’ve created...a different approach as to how we co-operate to attack the entire supply chain of this devastating impact of drugs – cocaine, heroin, fentanyl, opioids,” Tillerson said after meeting with Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray and Canada's Chrystia Freeland in Mexico City.

“This is having a horrible effect on American citizens, Mexican citizens, Canadian citizens.”

In October, Trump declared the US opioid crisis a national public health emergency, after overdoses of drugs such as heroin and fentanyl killed more than 40,000 people in 2016.

Videgaray said all three countries had agreed to place “special emphasis” on fighting both the supply and demand side of the problem: the Mexican drug cartels fueling a wave of bloodshed in his country, and the US and Canadian

consumption making it a multi-billion-dollar business. “The paradigm has to be one of cooperation, not blaming each other,” he said.

Tillerson later met with Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto, saying they both agreed the two countries’ relationship remained strong.

“We have too many things of common interest that we need to be working on to allow anything to get in the way,” Tillerson told US embassy staff after the meeting.

Mexico and Canada's top diplomats also played down tensions, despite Trump's tirades and a recent series of trade disputes between the Washington and Ottawa.

“In many ways the relationship today is more close, it's more fluid, than it was with the previous administration. That might be a surprise for many people, but it's a fact,” Videgaray said.

Freeland said Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau “really get along” and called Tillerson “an incredibly important voice in maintaining the rules-based international order.”

But it was impossible to paper over tensions on certain issues.

Videgaray stayed mum as Tillerson sought to explain Trump's wall proposal and immigration crackdown as part of a shared security push.

Deporting those who lack immigration papers fits into Trump's law and order agenda, even if it is “painful” for some people, Tillerson said.

Videgaray said both that and the wall were internal decisions for the US government.

But he added that a mass exodus of “Dreamers” – who were illegally brought to the United States as children and are now at the centre of a bitter political battle – would be “an enormous gain for Mexico and a loss for the United States.”

Tillerson flew out Friday evening for Argentina, and will then visit Peru, Colombia and Jamaica, pushing for stronger action on Venezuela and touting his vision of deeper co-operation.

Secure borders



US President Donald Trump speaks as acting commissioner of US Customs and Border Protection Kevin K McAleenan looks on during a meeting at the Customs and Border Protection National Targeting Center in Sterling, Virginia, on Friday.

Man charged over armour-piercing bullet sale to Las Vegas gunman

Reuters
Los Angeles

An ammunition dealer who has acknowledged selling hundreds of rounds of tracer bullets to a gunman responsible for killing 58 people in Las Vegas was charged on Friday with conspiracy to make and sell armour-piercing ammunition without a licence.

Douglas Haig, 55, of the Phoenix suburb of Mesa, Arizona, became the first person arrested and charged in connection with the October 1 massacre, which ended when the perpetrator, Stephen Paddock, killed himself.

But Haig told a news conference at the office of his attorney on Friday that none of the surplus military ammunition he sold Paddock in September was ever fired during the killing spree, which ranks as the deadliest mass shooting in modern US history. Nearly 500 people were injured.

Haig said he had no inkling of any criminal intent by Paddock.

The ammunition dealer said

Paddock told him, when asked, that he planned to use the tracer bullets to “put on a light show either with, or for, his friends” in the desert.

Paddock strafed a crowd of outdoor concert-goers with rapid-fire gunshots from his high-rise suite at the Mandalay Bay hotel before police stormed his room to find the 64-year-old retiree dead.

No motive for the massacre has ever been established.

Haig said he was certain the gunman never used any of the 720 rounds of magnesium-packed tracer bullets Paddock had purchased from him.

“You would have seen red streaks coming from the window. And there weren’t red steaks coming from the window,” he said.

His lawyer, Marc Victor, suggested the casualty toll would have been lower had the tracer rounds been used, because victims would have seen the trajectory of gunfire in the dark and been able to take cover more easily.

“It’s probably a bad thing that the ammunition Doug sold was not used,” Victor said.

Haig also said there was nothing

suspicious in Paddock’s demeanor when he visited Haig’s home to make the purchase.

“He was very well dressed, very well groomed, very polite, very respectful – told me what he wanted, I gathered it up, put it in a box, told him what he owed me. He paid me, put it in his car and drove away,” Haig recounted.

Victor called it “a routine transaction to purchase a routine type of ammunition that is available in many different retail outlets throughout the state of Arizona.”

Victor said the two men had no further contact.

Victor said Haig got into the ammunition re-sale business in 1991 as a hobby, and has always been a “law-abiding citizen.”

Haig was charged with a single count of conspiracy to manufacture and sell armour-piercing ammunition, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, according to the statement.

The criminal complaint, filed in a US District court in Phoenix, said Haig previously had run an internet business selling armour-

piercing bullets – including high-explosive and incendiary rounds – throughout the United States.

It said some merchandise sold through that business consisted of cartridges that had been “re-loaded,” or assembled from component parts, though Haig lacked a license to make such ammunition for sale.

According to the complaint, Haig insisted to investigators that while he reloads ammunition cartridges for himself, he never offered them to paying customers and that none reloaded by him would turn up at the crime scene in Las Vegas.

However, prosecutors said Haig’s fingerprints were found on some of the unfired rounds in Paddock’s hotel suite and that armour-piercing cartridges recovered there bore tool marks matching the reloading equipment in Haig’s workshop.

Haig made an initial court appearance before a federal magistrate in Phoenix and was freed on his own recognizance under conditional release pending a February 15 status conference set for the case, prosecutors said.

Federal immigration agents crack down on ‘sanctuary state’ California

US immigration officials said Friday they raided 77 California businesses this week as operations intensify in the state, whose own authorities are defying President Donald Trump's hard line on immigration by not co-operating with federal enforcement agents.

The raids took place in cities including San Francisco, Sacramento and San Jose in the north of California – a “sanctuary state” where, since January 1, law enforcement has been mostly prohibited from working with federal officials seeking to arrest undocumented immigrants.

“The actions taken this week reflect...stepped-up efforts to enforce the laws that prohibit businesses from hiring illegal workers,” with a focus on “protecting jobs for US citizens and others who are lawfully employed,” US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) said in a statement.

In 2017, the government carried out 1,360 similar raids and arrested more than 300 people – with businesses paying out over \$100mn in restitution and fines, ICE said.

“It’s put people in a lot of panic,” Mariela Garcia, with San Jose-based charity Sacred Heart Community Service, told the local Mercury News. “We have people who are quitting their jobs.”

Brazil's president: 'I remain alive'

Brazil's President Michel Temer really wants to clear something up: he's alive.

Temer had to insist on the point yesterday after the state pension organization cut his payments for November and December, citing lack of proof that the 77-year-old leader of Latin America's biggest country hadn't died.

The glitch came after Temer failed to comply with a requirement in Brazil that pensioners appear once a year before the pension authorities to declare themselves still among the living.

“In my case, it's obvious, I mean every day you can see that I remain alive,” Temer said in an interview with RedeTV news.

Temer laughed off the bureaucratic glitch, which was first reported this week by O Globo newspaper, saying he was “glad to be treated as a Brazilian.”

“I have to turn up to prove that I am alive. I think it's an egalitarian kind of treatment,” he said.

Temer, who is Brazil's most unpopular president on record, underwent angioplasty in three coronary arteries last year. Two stents were implanted. He also had surgery to reduce the size of his prostate after suffering urological blockage.

But Temer said he's now feeling “great, I'm really well.”

Canada's PM talks tough on Nafta, repeats he could walk away

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took a tough line on Nafta on Friday, repeating that he could walk away if he was not happy with talks to modernise a pact the United States contends needs major changes.

“The negotiations are complex and challenging...I've said many times, we are not going to take any old deal,” Trudeau told a sometimes raucous town hall event in the Pacific province of British Columbia. “Canada is willing to walk away from Nafta if the United States proposes a bad deal.”

“We will not be pushed around. At the same time we can remain confident about Nafta,” he said, adding that if Washington walked away from the deal it would be “extremely harmful and disruptive” to both the United States and Canada.

Canada and Mexico are striving to address US demands for Nafta reform, which they argue threaten the highly integrated North American economy.

Last Monday, a senior US trade official rejected proposals for unblocking the negotiations but pledged to seek “break-throughs,” easing concerns



Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addresses the crowd during a town hall meeting at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo, British Columbia, on Friday night.

that Washington would soon withdraw from the \$1.2tn North American Free Trade Agreement.

Trudeau said he did not think US President Donald Trump would pull out of Nafta, despite slow progress at the talks.

During the town hall event Trudeau was interrupted by hecklers angry that his Liberal

government approved a plan by Kinder Morgan Canada to increase the capacity of an oil pipeline from Alberta to British Columbia. Police removed at least three demonstrators, who complained the risk of a spill was too great to allow the project to continue.

Trudeau repeated that the pipeline would be built.

With an eye on Russia, US to increase nuclear capabilities

By Idrees Ali, Reuters
Washington

Concerned about Russia's growing tactical nuclear weapons, the United States will expand its nuclear capabilities, a policy document released on Friday said, a move some critics say could increase the risk of miscalculation between the two countries.

It represents the latest sign of hardening resolve by President Donald Trump's administration to address challenges from Russia, at the same time he is pushing for improved ties with Moscow to rein in a nuclear North Korea.

The focus on Russia is in line with the Pentagon shifting priorities from the fight against Is-

lamist militants to “great power competition” with Moscow and Beijing.

“Our strategy will ensure Russia understands that any use of nuclear weapons, however limited, is unacceptable,” the document, known as the Nuclear Posture Review, said.

The rationale for building up new nuclear capabilities, US officials said, is that Russia currently perceives the United States’ nuclear posture and capabilities as inadequate.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said in a statement yesterday it was very disappointed by the content of the document, which, it said, has a confrontational feel and anti-Russian orientation.

“We, of course, will have to take into account the approach enacted now in Washington and

to take the needed measures to secure our own safety,” the ministry said.

It denied accusations against Russia made in the US document.

The ministry added that Russia was ready to work constructively with the Americans.

By expanding its own low-yield nuclear capability, the United States would deter Russia from using nuclear weapons, US officials argue.

Low-yield nuclear weapons, while still devastating, have a strength of less than 20 kilotons. The atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima had about the same explosive power.

The argument for these weapons is that larger nuclear bombs are so catastrophic that they would never be used and do not work as an effective deterrent.

With less power and destruction, the low-yield option would potentially be more likely to be used, serving as an effective deterrent.

The Pentagon document, which is largely in line with the previous review in 2010, said the United States will modify a small number of submarine-launched ballistic missile warheads with low-yield options.

In the long term, the US military will also develop a new nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile.

The missile could have the less powerful option, but a decision has not been made, and will take up to a decade to develop, officials said.

Greg Weaver, deputy director of strategic capabilities at the Pentagon, said the United States

would be willing to limit developing the missile if Russia would “redress the imbalance in non-strategic nuclear forces”.

Weaver said the most difficult task for those working on the review was trying to address the gap between Russian and American non-strategic nuclear weapons.

Russia has a stockpile of 2,000 non-strategic nuclear weapons, according to the Pentagon.

The US has a few hundred active low-yield weapons deployed in Europe.

The US State Department said it had briefed Russian and Chinese officials on the review.

US officials argue that since the last nuclear review, Russia has expanded and modernized its non-strategic nuclear weapons, annexed Crimea in 2014, and de-

ployed a ground-launched cruise missile that breaches the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty.

The treaty bans testing and fielding missiles with ranges of 500km to 5,500km.

The report also, for the first time publicly, said Russia was developing a hypersonic, nuclear-powered undersea torpedo.

“The US is not arms racing, we are responding to Russian initiative here,” Weaver said.

Some experts have questioned the expansion.

Jon Wolfsthal, a former top advisor to president Barack Obama on arms control, said there was a possibility that it could lead to a miscalculation.

“If we put nuclear weapons on cruise missiles and we launch conventional cruise missiles,

how does Russia know that they are conventional?” he said.

The review called for continuing the B-83 bomb, the largest nuclear weapon in the US stockpile, until a replacement is found, reversing plans to retire it.

The document argues that by developing US nuclear responses, it raises the Russian threshold for using the weapons, rather than lowering the US threshold.

Kingston Reif, director for disarmament research at the Arms Control Association advocacy group, said the document could bolster a new kind of arms race.

“It's not an arms race in terms of numbers like during the Cold War, but is an arms race that involves more than just the United States and Russia and it involves upgrading and improving the capability of existing nuclear forces,” Reif said.

North Korea flouts sanctions, earns millions from banned exports: UN

AFP
United Nations

North Korea is flouting sanctions by exporting coal, iron, steel and other banned commodities, earning nearly \$200mn in revenue last year, a UN report said.

A UN panel of experts also found evidence of military co-operation by North Korea to develop Syria's chemical weapons programmes and to provide Myanmar with ballistic missiles.

North Korea "continued to export almost all the commodities prohibited in the resolutions, generating nearly \$200mn in revenue between January and September 2017," said the report by the experts seen by AFP.

Coal shipments were delivered to China, Malaysia, South Korea, Russia and Vietnam by ships using "a combination of multiple evasion techniques, routes and deceptive tactics," said the report.

The Security Council last year adopted a series of resolutions to tighten and expand exports bans aimed at cutting off revenue to North Korea's military programmes.

The United States led the push for tough economic sanctions after North Korea's sixth nuclear test and a series of ballistic missile launches that raised fears

that the US mainland could soon be within reach. Seven ships have been barred from ports worldwide for violating UN sanctions with coal and petroleum transfers, but the experts said much more must be done to confront "these rampant illicit activities."

The panel found that North Korea "is already flouting the most recent resolutions by exploiting global oil supply chains, complicit foreign nationals, offshore company registries, and the international banking system."

Syria and Myanmar are continuing co-operation with North Korea's KOMID corporation, the country's main arms exporter, which is on a UN sanctions blacklist, the report said.

The panel uncovered more than 40 previously unreported shipments from North Korea between 2012 and 2017 to front companies for Syria's Scientific Studies Research Council, also known as CERS, a key institute for Syria's chemical programme.

The investigations reveal "substantial new evidence" concerning Pyongyang's military co-operation with Damascus, including at least three visits by North Korean technicians to Syria in 2016.

A visit by a North Korean technical delegation in August 2016 involved the "transfer of special resistance valves and thermom-

eters known for use in chemical weapons programmes," said the report. A member-state that was not named told the panel that North Korean "technicians continue to operate at chemical weapons and missile facilities at Barzei, Adra and Hama" in Syria, said the report.

Syria however told the panel that there were no North Korean technicians in its territory and that the only experts it was hosting from the country were involved in sports.

A member-state, which was not named, also notified the panel that Myanmar had received "ballistic missile systems from (North Korea) in addition to a range of conventional weapons, including multiple rocket launches and surface-to-air missiles". North Korean diplomats, in particular trade representatives, continue to provide logistical support for arms sales and help organise exchanges for military technicians, it said.

While sanctions have been significantly broadened, this "expansion of the regime is yet to be matched by the requisite political will" to implement the measures, the experts said.

The panel of experts said 2018 offered a "critical window of opportunity before a potential miscalculation with disastrous implications for international peace and security."



University students carry a float mocking Thailand's junta number two Pravit Wongsuwan over a current scandal over his undeclared collection of luxury watches, during the annual football match between Thammasat University and Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, yesterday.

Thai students taunt 'Rolex General' in latest dissent

AFP
Bangkok

Thai students with huge banners and caricature puppets yesterday delivered the latest satirical swipe at the junta's number two — known as the "Rolex General" for his collection of undeclared luxury watches.

The watch scandal has seized a kingdom growing weary of military rule and sparked a spate of creative protests that are challenging the junta's stranglehold on dissent.

Yesterday, students leading an annual pre-football match ceremony in Bangkok wheeled a series of massive parade floats around the pitch — including several poking fun at junta

No 2 Pravit Wongsuwan. The 72-year-old general has been the target of public ire ever since a photo circulated of him in December lifting a hand to block his eyes from the sun, revealing a diamond ring and a pricey Richard Mille watch.

Since then, online sleuths have unearthed photos of the junta bigwig wearing some 25 luxury timepieces that he allegedly failed to list when declaring his assets.

One parade float yesterday showed a puppet in the general's now iconic sun-blocking pose, with a glittering ring and watch beaming from his massive paper mache hand.

Students marching alongside were linked together by chains and held banners saying "Stop making fun of the watches," in a

nod to the junta's efforts to suppress the scandal.

Another float mocked Pravit's excuse that he borrowed the timepieces from friends — an alibi now being probed by an anti-graft agency.

The football parade, held annually ahead of a match between rival universities Thammasat and Chulalongkorn, is often provocative and political.

But the show was especially anticipated this year as the watch scandal wakes up Thailand's civil society.

In recent weeks, a growing number of activists have taken to the streets to defy a junta ban on protests and call for elections.

The generals promised a swift return to democracy after seizing power in 2014 but have

repeatedly delayed poll dates.

"Thais are becoming exhausted with the military regime. Pravit is a simple indicator of what these people think is wrong with the (junta): impunity and double-standards," said Thailand-based political analyst Paul Chambers.

The regime hit back by filing charges against dozens of activists this week over their protests.

But that has not stopped the flurry of Internet memes and other sly expressions of dissent, including graffiti of Pravit's face framed by an alarm clock.

The street art was left untouched on a Bangkok pedestrian bridge for four days before being whitewashed by police, according to its creator, who goes by "Headache Stencil".

North Korea 'used Berlin embassy for procurement'

DPA
Berlin

Pyongyang used the North Korean embassy in Berlin to procure high-tech parts for its nuclear programme, the head of Germany's domestic intelligence agency BFV told broadcaster NDR yesterday.

"We had determined that procurement activities were taking place from there, from our perspective with an eye on the ballistic programme, as well as in part the nuclear programme," Hans-Georg Maassen said.

Often the items involved

were so-called dual-use goods, which can be used for civil as well as military purposes.

"When we detect something of this sort, we prevent it," Maassen said.

"We cannot guarantee, however, that we can recognise and prevent it in all cases."

It stands to reason, Maassen said, that parts for North Korea's ballistic programme "were acquired through other markets, or that shadow firms acquired them in Germany."

Maassen's comments come a day after a draft UN report circulated through US media alleging that North Korea has sold weapons to Syria and Myanmar, and accusing China and Russia

of failing to do enough to curb the country's illegal trade.

The report, which was quoted by the Wall Street Journal, among other media, cited evidence that North Korea has sold a ballistic missile system to Myanmar and that it may be helping Syria with a chemical weapons programme.

It also said that North Korea made around \$200mn last year by exporting coal and other commodities in violation of UN sanctions aimed at reining in the country's nuclear weapons programme.

The report also said much of the shipments passed through Chinese, Russian, Malaysian and Vi-

etnamese ports and that more than 30 representatives of North Korean financial institutions were operating abroad, including in China and Russia.

Citing intelligence from member countries, the report said that Syria had been sent special acid-resistant tiles in two North Korean shipments which could be used to build the interior walls of a chemical factory.

News of the UN report came hours after US Secretary of Defence Jim Mattis said that the US was investigating the Syrian government over reports that it was using the deadly nerve gas sarin on the battlefield.

Stranded tourists freed as roads reopen in NZ

Reuters
Sydney

Hundreds of tourists trapped in a remote New Zealand town for 48 hours after a strong storm damaged roads were freed yesterday after authorities cleared a highway.

About 600 tourists are now able to leave the remote town of Haast, 426km northwest of Dunedin on the west coast of the South Island, a world heritage area famous for rugged scenery, after the road was cleared.

State Highway Six reopened at 11am, the NZ Transport Agency told Reuters in an e-mail. "All stranded motorists have now been able to leave,"

it said. The road was hit by landslips as wild weather from former tropical cyclone Fehi wreaked havoc across the west coast, uprooting trees, felling power lines, collapsing a bridge and blocking roads.

A further 117 motorists stranded at Fox Glacier were also able to move yesterday after roads were repaired, West Coast Civil Defence officials said by telephone.

The storm flooded the southern city of Dunedin and the west coast town of Buller, forcing authorities to declare a state of emergency and ask people not to travel by road.

Health authorities warned people to avoid contact with flood waters that could be contaminated by sewage, Radio NZ said.

China accuses US of disrespect after LatAm comments

China accused the United States of disrespecting Latin America after US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warned countries in the region against excessive reliance on economic ties with China.

Tillerson, in a speech ahead of a visit to Mexico, Argentina, Peru, Colombia and Jamaica, said China was getting a foothold in Latin America, using economic statecraft to pull the region into its orbit. In a statement released late on Friday responding to Tillerson, China's Foreign Ministry said co-operation between China and Latin America is based on common interests and mutual needs. "What the United States said is entirely against the truth and displayed disrespect to the vast number of Latin American countries," the ministry said.

Co-operation between China and Latin American countries is based on equality, reciprocity, openness and inclusiveness, it added.

BBC journo ordered to leave Indonesia's Papua

Reuters
Jakarta

A BBC journalist on a reporting trip to cover a health and malnutrition crisis in Indonesia's easternmost area of Papua was forced to leave the province after the country's military said tweets she sent on her trip had "hurt soldiers' feelings".

Papua is one of Indonesia's poorest areas and President Joko Widodo after coming to power in 2014 pledged to speed up its development and ease media restrictions in the area, where there has been a simmering secessionist movement.

But while investment has risen and efforts made to address some human rights concerns, activists say foreign journalists continue to be blocked or face obstacles when trying to report.

Indonesia's military said in

a statement that a tweet sent by Rebecca Henschke, BBC Indonesia's editor, had "hurt the feelings of TNI (Indonesian military) personnel" involved in relief efforts in the Asmat area.

Henschke had tweeted a photo of supplies on her personal Twitter account, adding: "This is the aid coming in for severely malnourished children in Papua — instant noodles, super sweet soft drinks and biscuits."

Papua military spokesman Colonel Mohamed Aidi said: "(The food and drink) that she took the picture of at the speedboat pier are not donations or aid.

It was merchandise from merchants that was incidentally there." Aidi also described two other tweets as misleading.

Henschke, a Jakarta-based Australian citizen, later took down the photograph and tweeted: "Adding important Note: Other sources say this is NOT

aid but normal supplies. Huge relief effort underway here."

Indonesia has deployed additional military personnel to help in Asmat, where at least 61 infants are reported to have died from malnutrition and diseases such as measles.

Henschke had asked to be allowed to continue covering the story during questioning by security forces over her tweets on Friday, but was escorted to the city of Timika and held by immigration, the military statement said.

Henschke declined to comment, but a BBC spokesperson said via e-mail: "A BBC team on a deployment to Papua province has now returned to Jakarta.

They had the necessary documentation and the authorities were aware of their visit. The BBC respects local laws wherever it operates."

Many Papuans, who are predominantly Christian and a

minority in Indonesia, criticise Jakarta for neglecting Papua and instead being too focused on the densely-populated island of Java.

Catholic priest and rights activist John Jonga blamed the crisis on a lack of vaccinations and a switch from more nutritious tubers to rice as a staple food.

Some of the forest-dwelling Asmat are also reported to be increasingly relying on instant food or energy drinks.

Andreas Harsono of Human Rights Watch said Henschke's treatment showed pledges to open up Papua had not materialised.

"She had her travel permit — the only Indonesian area where foreign journalists need to get a permit to visit — and still got intimidation for a single tweet," said Harsono.

A presidential spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.



File photo shows Indonesian soldiers along with a local resident unloading food and medical aid in Ewer, Asmat District, in the remote region of Papua, Indonesia.



Corbyn set to vow return of ‘municipal socialism’

By Rowena Mason
Guardian News and Media

Jeremy Corbyn is to promise to bring back “municipal socialism” to the UK, while defending Labour’s decision to ask one of its local councils to halt a controversial public-private housing scheme.

In a speech today to party councillors, the Labour leader will say it is crucial for local authorities to reverse the privatisation of public services, pointing to cases where councils are already “taking measures to bring services back in-house and reject costly PFI-style models”.

He will say this is happening at a time when the “whole edifice of the ‘private good, public bad’ dogma has crumbled” and Labour councils are leading the way in protecting the public from austerity.

“With amazing creativity in the toughest of times, we are seeing the first shoots of the renaissance of local government for the many, not the few – the rebirth of municipal socialism,” Corbyn is to say.

He is then expected to defend the party executive’s unanimous decision to ask Labour-run Haringey council to reconsider its decision to introduce a controversial private-public housing scheme.

The furore resulted in the resigna-

tion of its chief executive, Claire Kober, who accused some of her critics of intimidation and bullying.

Related: Haringey boss Claire Kober: ‘The argument that I’m incompetent would not have been used if I were a man’

At the speech in Nottingham, Corbyn will suggest this intervention was a one-off in exceptional circumstances, after the decision led to concern among other elected council leaders about the national executive committee (NEC) getting too involved in local policy.

“It has been a unique situation, which is why the NEC unanimously asked the council leadership to put their plans on hold and take part in a mediation process – to bring everyone together,” he will say.

“Because when we bring people together and listen to everyone’s voices, we make better decisions. Democracy creates better outcomes for communities ... Regeneration must put local people first, not property speculators. That’s why Labour is committed to giving residents the right to a ballot across the country so that when we’re in government we can deliver real regeneration for the many, not the few.”

Labour took the unprecedented decision last week to ask Haringey to reconsider the plans to go into

partnership with developer Lend-lease to build 6,400 new homes in the borough.

The scheme, known as the Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV), was approved in July by the council, which has promised to replace existing council houses and rehouse current tenants.

Kober’s successor will now decide whether to abandon the scheme.

Its critics say the HDV would bulldoze existing council estates without effective guarantees that existing tenants would be able to return, and puts billions of pounds of public assets partially into private hands.

The scheme has been extremely divisive in the local party, leading to the deselection of several Labour councillors who supported the project.

Two local MPs, David Lammy and Catherine West, have also expressed concerns about the scheme.

However, some within Labour were also outraged by the NEC’s decision to intervene in local politics.

Last weekend, the leaders of over 70 councils, including Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle and many London boroughs, said the actions of the NEC were “dangerous and alarming”, “uncomradely and disrespectful” and “an affront to the basic principles of democracy”.



An August 12, 2012, file photo of the Spice Girls performing during the closing ceremony of the 2012 London Olympic Games at the Olympic stadium in London.

Spice Girls to work together again

DPA
London

The Spice Girls have confirmed that they are planning to work together again on some “new opportunities,” almost two decades after they split up.

The confirmation came hours after the five – Victoria Beckham, Melanie Brown, Melanie Chisholm, Geri Horner and Emma Bunton – began sharing photos on social media of a catch-up at Horner’s home outside London.

“We have enjoyed a wonderful afternoon catching-up and remi-

niscing about the amazing times we have spent together,” the band said in a statement.

“We are always overwhelmed at how much interest there is across the whole world for The Spice Girls. The time now feels right to explore some incredible new opportunities together,” the statement continued.

Horner had earlier posted a picture of the five on her Instagram account, saying “Lovely seeing the girls #girlpower is alive and well” while Bunton wrote “the future is looking spicy!”

It was reportedly the first time the five had all been in the same room since 2012.

The Sun tabloid reported that they would get £10mn each for new projects and that Beckham had sought assurances that she would not have to sing.

The band shot to fame in 1996 with the single Wannabe and went on to have a series of number one hits including Who Do You Think Are, 2 Become 1 and Viva Forever.

The band even made a film, Spice World.

They split up in 2000, though they reunited for a tour of Europe and the United States in 2008 and also performed at the Olympic closing ceremony in London in 2012.



Demonstrators hold banners on a protest march in central London yesterday, organised by ‘The People’s Assembly Against Austerity’ highlighting their opposition to the government’s health policy.

Fix the NHS: Protesters demand government act

By Ruth McKee
Guardian News and Media

Health workers, activists and unions marched in central London yesterday to protest against government inaction over the NHS winter crisis.

Hospitals have been overwhelmed in recent weeks by a surge in admissions that has led to delays of up to 12 hours on emergency wards, patients left on trolleys for hours and thousands of patients forced to wait in ambulances before receiving urgent care.

Two pressure groups, the People’s Assembly and Health Campaigns Together, have organised the rally to call on the government to plug funding and resource gaps in the health service.

Actor Ralf Little joined hundreds of

nurses, doctors and campaigners, and called on the health secretary, Jeremy Hunt, to attend the demonstration as well.

The Royle Family actor, who was studying medicine before his acting career took off, was embroiled in a social media spat with Hunt last year over funding for mental healthcare on the NHS.

Little said: “I would like to extend a sincere invitation to you to attend, and use this platform to demonstrate that you acknowledge the importance of our previous discussion regarding lack of resources, staff and funding for our health service.

“We are now consistently hearing reports of patients dying at home before paramedics arrive, police cars being used to take patients to hospital as there are insufficient ambulances, or that when patients arrive in hospitals they are dying on trolleys in hospital corridors. Many of

us are extremely worried about what this means should our loved ones become ill.”

Unite, Unison and the TUC were among the unions marching through central London from noon, before holding an hour-long rally opposite Downing Street.

Cecilia Anim, the president of the Royal College of Nursing, said patients would suffer if urgent action was not taken.

“Staff at every level are experiencing burnout and many of our colleagues are turning their back on jobs they love. It’s no surprise that nursing staff feel over-stretched and undervalued. There are now more than 40,000 nurse vacancies in England alone.”

Sheena Archer, a healthcare assistant, said she was attending the protest because “morale is at an absolute low”.

“We’ve got to stand up for each other. Patients deserve better and we deserve better too,” she said.

UK police probe fresh Weinstein assault claims by nine women

British police are now investigating sexual assault allegations brought by nine women against US film mogul Harvey Weinstein, according to media reports yesterday.

Scotland Yard confirmed that its Operation Kaguayak was investigating 14 separate claims brought by nine women, but it doesn’t identify suspects unless they have been charged.

British media, including the Press Association, reported that the claims relate to the disgraced producer.

The latest claims were reported to police on November 13 by a woman who said she was assaulted in London in 2011, and on a separate occasion outside the UK in 2010.

The second allegation will be passed to the relevant police force.

Accusations of sexual assault have continued to pour in since investigations in The New York Times and The New Yorker last year exposed a series of accounts of sexual predation by the film tycoon.

More than 50 women including stars Gwyneth Paltrow, Angelina Jolie and Mira Sorvino have accused 65-year-old Weinstein of sexual abuse and harassment, though he has denied forcing himself on anyone.

Veterans’ protest



Protesters from ‘Justice for Northern Ireland Veterans’ demonstrate in Horse Guards Parade in Westminster yesterday.

Engineers race to repair ‘massive hole’ left by deluge

Workers were battling over the weekend to restore normality to the busy street that was turned “into a river” when a water main burst, the Evening Standard reports from London. Thames Water engineers are working throughout the weekend and into next week to patch up Goldhawk Road after a leak wreaked major disruption. A spokeswoman said: “There was a large water pipe to repair and they’re getting the road back to normal.”

The work now involves filling in the “massive hole” left in the street by the rupture as well as restoring road markings, she said.

It is not yet known if the disaster, which closed off large sections of Goldhawk Road and Hammersmith Grove, was linked to a leak at King Street a mile away just a few days beforehand. “It’s too early to say but there will be an investigation into both incidents,” the spokeswoman said.

Several shops and businesses were unable to open on Wednesday after the rupture at 2.46am, with some residents reportedly stranded by the rising floodwater.

Engineers fought through the morning to locate the source of the leak and bring it under control, with Thames Water shipping in bottled water for those left without a supply.

Brackenbury Primary School was closed, and Goldhawk Road shut for several hundred metres between the station and Sycamore Gardens. Hammersmith Grove was also closed down to Astrop Terrace.

Resident Jayden Wright, 25, said at the time: “It’s a nightmare. The water is gushing right outside my flat. I gave to get to work and other people have to get their kids to school, it’s total chaos.”

Repairs to the King Street pipe are also now expected to run into next week due to the scale of the damage caused to the road.

Green Brexit is impossible to guarantee, says Tory MEP document

By Arthur Neslen
Guardian News and Media

The European Conservative and Reformist group which represents Conservative MEPs has said Brexit will make it “impossible” to guarantee that current environmental standards can be maintained in Britain or the EU.

A leaked document seen by the Guardian also calls for “the closest possible working relationship” between the EU and UK after Brexit, and for a “no regression clause” in future British trade deals.

This would “limit any negative effects from deregulation,” says the paper, which was submitted to the European parliament’s Brexit environment steering group.

Some Conservative MEPs claimed not to have seen the report that was submitted.

The parliament’s Brexit coordinator, Guy Verhofstadt, told the Guardian: “Suggestions that the UK might seek to lower environmental standards after Brexit are alarming and contradict the commitments made by Prime Minister May in her Florence speech.”

They also showed why a future

deal “must contain precise and detailed safeguards, with robust sanctions, to ensure the maintenance of high standards and a level playing field,” he said.

“It is astonishing to find that Conservative MEPs have confirmed everything that we have been saying during the passage of the trade bill this week about the need to secure our environmental standards and protections”

The EU’s environmental laws are among its most popular, with polls showing that over 80% of Britons support the same levels

of protection – or higher – after Brexit.

During the referendum campaign, key government ministers said EU laws such as the birds and habitats directive were “spirit-crushing” and would be scrapped.

But Theresa May has sought to defuse fears of conservation backsliding by trying to make the environment a selling point of leaving the bloc.

“Let me be very clear,” May said in a speech last month.

“Brexit will not mean a lowering of environmental standards.

“We will use the opportunity Brexit provides to strengthen

and enhance our environmental protections – not to weaken them.”

“If the UK withdraws from the single market it will be impossible to fully ensure that the country’s environmental policies do not have a negative impact”

Last week, Michael Gove described “Green Brexit” as “our chance to give the environment a voice in this time of national renewal.”

But the leaked submission says: “By definition, if the UK government fulfils its stated ob-

jective of leaving the European Union, then it will be impossible to ‘ensure’ the country maintains the ‘same ... standards’ on environmental, health and food safety issues.”

Equally, “if the UK withdraws from the single market it will be impossible to fully ensure that the country’s environmental policies do not have a negative impact (on Europe),” the paper adds.

The Conservative group describes ensuring the closest possible ties with the EU after Brexit as being “of crucial importance” partly to prevent what the report calls “a race to the bottom

amongst states within a similar geographical area”.

Labour party frontbenchers expressed shock at the document, and called on the government to bring forward proposals to earmark current green regulations as a baseline for future trade deals.

Barry Gardiner, Labour’s shadow secretary for international trade and climate change, said: “It is astonishing to find that Conservative MEPs have confirmed everything that we have been saying during the passage of the trade bill this week about the need to secure our environmental standards and protections.”

African migrants hurt in Italy drive-by shootings

Reuters
Rome

An Italian man yesterday opened fire on African migrants in the central city of Macerata, injuring six people in the racially-motivated attack before he was captured, police said.

The shootings happened just days after a Nigerian migrant was arrested in connection with the death of an 18-year-old Italian woman, whose dismembered body was discovered hidden in two suitcases near Macerata.

Police named the suspected shooter as Luca Traini, 28, and said he had an Italian flag draped over his shoulders when he was seized in the street by armed police.

A pistol was found in his nearby car.

“He drove around in his car and when he saw any coloured people he shot them,” Marcello Mancini, a Macerata resident, told Reuters television.

Police said one of the six victims was seriously hurt and needed surgery, but gave no further details.

The ruling centre-left Democratic Party (PD) said Traini had stood as a candidate for the rightist Northern League at local elections last year and accused him of also firing shoots at one of their offices in Macerata before he was arrested.

The League backs fiercely anti-immigrant policies and is part of ex-prime Silvio Berlusconi’s centre-



Police forensics officers are reflected in a glass door with bullet holes following the drive-by shooting in Macerata yesterday.

right alliance that is leading in the polls ahead of a March 4 national election.

League leader Matteo Salvini distanced himself from the shooting, but said unrestrained immigration was causing social strife.

“I can’t wait to get into government to restore security, social justice and serenity to Italy,” he said.

PD leader Matteo Renzi called for calm. “The man who fired the gun, hitting six people of colour, is a squalid, mad person. But the state is stronger than him,” the former prime minister wrote on Facebook.

Police said the shooter drove around Macerata, which is famed for its outdoor opera festivals, in a black Alfa Romeo car firing out of

his window at migrants in various locations.

With police closing in, he tried to escape by foot but was almost immediately caught.

Local media said he shouted, “Long live Italy,” as he was taken away.

Tensions in Macerata had risen this week following the gruesome

discovery of Pamela Mastropietro’s body. The teenager had run away from a drug rehabilitation centre on Monday and met a Nigerian asylum seeker, Innocent Oseghale, the next day.

Her body was found on Wednesday and a preliminary postmortem could not immediately identify the cause of death.

Witnesses said they had earlier seen Oseghale with the suitcases. He refused to talk to the police after his arrest.

Newspapers said he was denied asylum last year but had remained in Macerata to appeal against the decision.

“What was this worm still doing in Italy?” Northern League leader Salvini wrote on Facebook at mid-week, accusing the centre-left government of responsibility for Mastropietro’s death for allowing migrants to stay in the country.

“The left has blood on its hands,” he wrote.

More than 600,000 mainly African migrants have reached Italy by boat over the past four years.

The centre-right bloc, which includes the League, says the vast majority have no right to asylum and has promised mass expulsions if it takes power.

Leftist parties have ruled out any such deportations.

“The news from Macerata leaves me horrified and shocked. We must stop this spiral of hate and violence,” said Pietro Grasso, who is the head of the Free and Equal party.

German potential partners differ on health and labour

Reuters
Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s conservatives and the Social Democrats (SPD) yesterday sought to resolve disputes on healthcare and labour rules during talks to form a government more than four months after an election.

The two camps aim to seal a deal to renew the “grand coalition” that has governed Europe’s largest economy since 2013 by today, although some politicians say they could run into tomorrow or Tuesday.

SPD deputy Manuela Schwesig urged the conservatives to compromise on abolishing fixed-term contracts for workers and reforming Germany’s public-private healthcare system.

“I don’t think Mrs Merkel can explain why there can’t be any movement there,” she said as she arrived for talks.

The SPD wants to prove to its sceptical members that it would be able to push through those core policies in the role of junior partner to make another “grand coalition” more appealing.

Many of the SPD’s 443,000 members – who will get the chance to vote on any coalition deal – would prefer to revamp the party in opposition rather than another alliance with Merkel after suffering their worst post-war election result in September.

As a compromise, the conservatives have offered to ban the repeated renewal of fixed-term contracts but they do not want to prevent employers from using them.

The parties are still working on the topic.

The two camps made some progress on labour policy on Friday by agreeing that employees in companies with more than 45 employees should have the right to move seamlessly back and forth between full- and part-time work.

Healthcare is a big stumbling block and party sources said Merkel and her Bavarian ally Horst Seehofer discussed the issue before meeting with the SPD.

The conservatives reject replacing the current system with a “citizen’s insurance” as called for by the SPD and talks are now expected to focus on improving the position of those with public healthcare such as by changing billing rules for doctors, who earn more by treating private patients.

In a sign they are getting closer to a deal, the parties reached an accord on energy and environment, agreeing to set legally binding climate targets for sectors like energy, transport, agriculture and construction to reach by 2030.

Environment Minister Barbara Hendricks said national climate targets for 2020 would not be quite reached but the new targets, which would be written into law in 2019, would ensure Germany can remain a “climate protection pioneer”. In a full day of negotiations, the parties were also hoping to tick off issues including finances, rents and real estate prices, agriculture and municipalities.

They reached a deal on migration on Friday, agreeing to stick to the wording of January’s coalition blueprint that said the parties did not expect annual migration to exceed 220,000 per year.

But the two were still wrangling yesterday over its meaning, with Joachim Herrmann – a member of Merkel’s CSU Bavarian allies who have called for an upper limit – telling Rheinische Post his party had secured a migrant cap.

Meanwhile, SPD deputy Ralf Stegner insisted the number is merely a prediction, writing on Twitter: “The fact remains that the SPD has not agreed to any upper limit and will not do so.”

Migration is a sensitive issue given the influx of more than a mn migrants since mid-2015 and the conservatives’ subsequent loss of support to the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) in September’s national election.

Climbing legend Messner wary of wolves’ return to Germany

The return of wolves to Germany – already a topic in high-level political talks – is also bothering Italian climbing legend Reinhold Messner. Messner is a native of the South Tyrol region on the Italy-Austria border, where at least a dozen sheep were attacked by wolves last summer.

“They would have more space and wouldn’t be disturbed in areas outside central Europe,” such as Siberia, the 73-year-old adventurer told DPA.

The first reported sighting of wolves’ return to Germany was made in 2010.

Official estimates show that there are currently 60 packs in Germany, with each pack containing seven members on average.

There have been repeated instances of sheep, as well as deer and livestock, being killed by wolves.

“When the wolves start coming into the cities, what will we do then?” asked Messner, famous for scaling all 14 peaks around the world higher than 8,000m between 1970 and 1986.

The growth of the wolf population has also been part of intensive coalition talks to form Germany’s next government.

The spread of the wild animals should be “sensibly managed,” according to a preliminary coalition document seen by DPA. “People’s safety is the highest priority.”

Poland under pressure over Holocaust bill

Reuters
Warsaw

Poland is seeing a resurgence of anti-Semitism over pending legislation that would impose jail terms for suggestions that the nation was complicit in the Holocaust, local minority groups warned, as pressure mounts on the president to veto the bill.

Parliament passed the measure on Thursday, drawing outrage from Israel, US criticism and condemnation from a number of international organisations.

President Andrzej Duda has 21 days to decide whether to sign it into law.

The bill would impose prison sentences of up to three years for mentioning the term “Polish death camps” and for suggesting “publicly and against the facts” complicity on the part of the Polish nation or state in Nazi Germany crimes.

More than 3mn of Poland’s 3.2mn Jews were murdered by the Nazis, accounting for about half of the Jews killed in the Holocaust.

Jews from across Europe were sent to be killed at death camps built and operated by the Germans on Polish soil, including

Auschwitz, Treblinka, Belzec and Sobibor. According to figures from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Nazis also killed at least 1.9mn non-Jewish Polish civilians.

In a rare show of unity, Polish minority and ethnic groups, including Jewish, Ukrainian and Russian, urged Duda and other authorities to counteract all forms of xenophobia, intolerance and anti-Semitism, although they did not directly call on the president to veto the bill.

“Our particular concern and objection is caused by the numerous and loud manifestations of anti-Semitism that we have been witnessing this week after the (parliament) passed (the Holocaust bill),” the groups said in statement.

The Israeli embassy in Warsaw also issued a statement on Friday, saying that in the last few days there was “a wave of anti-Semitic statements, reaching the embassy through all channels of communication.” “We would like to use this opportunity to repeat that Israel stands with Poland in using the proper term for the death camps – German Nazi camps,” the embassy said in its statement.

Poland is one of the most ethnically and religiously homogenous countries in Eu-

rope, but before World War II Jews made up 10% of the population and the country also had large Ukrainian, German, Belarussian and other minorities.

Poland’s ruling party, the socially conservative PiS, has reignited debate on the Holocaust as part of a campaign to fuel patriotism since sweeping into power in 2015.

The party says the bill is needed to protect Poland’s reputation and ensure historians recognise that Poles as well as Jews were victims of the Nazis. Critics of the bill have raised concerns it will curb free speech and could potentially be used against Holocaust survivors or historians.

Duda has not said whether he would sign the bill, but his spokesman told the Polish state radio Trojka: “The president believes that Poland, as any other country, has the right to defend its good name...has the right to defend the truth.”

Jaroslav Kaczynski, the chairman of PiS and de facto the country’s leader, yesterday told the public radio Jedynka that Duda should sign the law. “He should sign it...,” Kaczynski said. “We must talk to our allies in a way that would allow them to understand that we have no intention of renouncing our dignity.”

Million predicted in Greek demo over Macedonia name row

AFP
Athens

A million people could take to the streets in Athens today in a mass demonstration over Greek attempts to resolve a longstanding name row with Macedonia, organisers say.

Huge crowds are predicted to fill central Syntagma Square to protest a rumoured Greek government compromise to the 27-year dispute with its tiny northern neighbour.

When Macedonia declared independence in 1991 from the collapsing Yugoslav federation, Athens protested, claiming the name implied a territorial claim on the prominent Greek province of Macedonia.

But Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has been considering a resolution to the name dispute, angering many in the opposition, but also among his nationalist coalition partners, the Independent Greeks.

“The square will be the meeting point of various heterogeneous groups guided by different sentiments, ranging from a profound concern about the name dispute to disaffection with government policies,” Nikolaos Tzifakis, head of the political science department at Peloponnese University, told AFP.

Tsipras has already faced doz-

ens of demonstrations while in power, but today’s mass protest – nominally about foreign policy – is expected to draw a motley crowd united by opposition to the prime minister, Tzifakis said.

Ironically, pundits expect the largest turnout since the 2015 anti-austerity referendum rally organised by Tsipras at the zenith of his popularity, rejecting cuts demanded by the country’s EU-IMF creditors.

Angering many, the Greek government instead agreed to more austerity measures as the country faced being kicked out of the eurozone. “Many people are now seeing this policy change (over Macedonia) through the prism of the economic crisis and qualify it as one concession too much,” Tzifakis adds.

Organisers of the Macedonia march, headed by Greek diaspora groups, have insisted their protest is apolitical. “We are all patriots. There are no parties, no colours,” said Georgia Bitakou, one of the organisers.

But another large protest on January 21 in Thessaloniki, the northern Greek capital, over the Macedonia name dispute was attended by several lawmakers from the conservative main opposition New Democracy party and neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn.

Whilst a far cry from a million-strong march on the issue over

two decades ago, organisers said more than 400,000 attended the protest. Police put the figure at closer to 90,000.

“Neither the government nor the opposition expected such a large number of participants. The Athens protest will therefore be quite closely watched by the political class,” said Manolis Alexakis, a political scientist at Crete University.

The dispute with Macedonia has festered for decades despite numerous UN-mediated talks to resolve the dispute. Greece considers the name “Macedonia” to be part of its own cultural heritage, as it is also the name of a historic Greek province that was the core of Alexander the Great’s ancient empire.

Athens thus seeks guarantees that the use of the name by its neighbour implies no claim to parts of its own territory. Because of Greece’s objections, Macedonia in 1993 joined the United Nations as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

To break the deadlock, long-term UN mediator Matthew Nimetz has now proposed several alternative names in Macedonian, including “Republika Nova Makedonija” or the “Republic of New Macedonia”.

Tsipras’ government says it is ready to accept a composite name that will establish a clear distinction from Greek Macedonia.

Preserved in time: WWII bunker hidden under Paris train station

By Jean Liou, AFP
Paris

It lies hidden deep beneath Paris’s bustling Gare de l’Est railway station, its sprawling subterranean rooms and sparse furniture pristinely preserved if a little dusty.

Originally built a few years before World War II for luggage storage, the underground bunker was repurposed after war broke out.

French railway historian Clive Lamming said its 1939 overhaul was to provide “a place to retreat in case of an air attack” so staff could keep the trains running east towards Germany.

Leading this AFP reporter through a concrete air lock and heavy door to the shelter, he said: “The concern was gas.” “We remembered World War I – a perfectly airtight place was needed,” he added.

With its 3m thick concrete ceiling, it was designed for about 70 people to be able to take refuge in the small rooms of the 120sq m shelter.

But, in the end, the bunker never really saw any action – Paris was largely spared from air attacks during WWII, and there

was little danger of poison gas.

After France’s defeat in 1940 and Nazi occupation, the bunker was requisitioned by the Germans and traces of their presence remain, including a sign that reads “Notausgang” (emergency exit).

“In my opinion, it hasn’t been finished,” said Lamming, as a high-speed TGV train loudly rumbled overhead.

Today, few of the thousands of travellers passing through the busy central Paris station will likely have any inkling of the time capsule under their feet.

Just a discreet trapdoor on the platform opens up to reveal a staircase leading down to the bunker, which is not publicly accessible except on certain occasions.

“For 80 years, it has been ‘Sleeping Beauty,’ Lamming said. “Everything is in mint condition from 1939.”

Entering the machine room is like stepping back into the 1930s, with the old contraptions, dials, copper piping and Bakelite handles only in need of a good polish.

The room also has two bicycles.

If the power went out, ventilation would have been provid-



French historian Clive Lamming explores the World War II bunker located under the Gare de l’Est in Paris.

ed by batteries – if they failed, anyone sheltering in the bunker was to hop on the bikes and pedal to circulate fresh air.

Other rooms also feel frozen in time, like the telephone exchange with its tangle of wires, but most are more spartan, furnished with a few period tables and chairs where staff could have directed the train traffic above.

The shelter was designed to host 72 workstations, and some yellowing documents remain. There is even a bed.

Post-war, with its purpose now passed, it gradually took on an almost mythic status among employees of SNCF, France’s national train operator.

“The aim is to preserve it,” especially as the shelters built in other stations at the time have all disappeared, said the SNCF branch in charge of stations.

Chances to visit are rare as the bunker was not built for large crowds but it does open up for annual Heritage Days events.

Electoral bonds a way to legalise political corruption: CPM

IANSS
New Delhi

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) yesterday termed electoral bonds of political financing a way to legalising political corruption which will result in trade-offs between political parties and corporates.

“The CPM has always believed that the first step to ending po-

litical corruption is to ban donations by corporates to political parties. This is the supply side of corruption ... and unless this is plugged, political corruption cannot be ended,” party general secretary Sitaram Yechury said here.

“Instead of that, you (the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party) are legalising political corruption. Electoral bonds are nothing but legalisation of political corruption,” he said.

The CPM has already challenged the electoral bonds in the Supreme Court which on Friday issued a notice to the government.

“This (electoral bond system) is dangerous in the sense that any foreign company can also now donate to political parties and nobody knows who is donating it, which of the party is receiving it.

“And they have removed the earlier clauses and stipulations

which had put a ceiling on the amount a corporate can donate to a political party... It means shell companies can be set up, money laundered,” Yechury said.

He condemned the bonds as violation of ‘right to know’ – as understood under Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution and Article 14 (Equality before Law) – brought for “perpetrating a fraud on the constitution by passing it as a money bill, even

though it does not qualify as a money bill under Article 110 of the Constitution”.

Yechury also criticised the amendments made to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) made through the Finance Bill 2018, which rendered valid all foreign contributions to political parties made since 1976 – the year FCRA was enacted.

“This again is a very, very dangerous move whereby for-

ign companies – who owns them, who controls them, to what method are they raising their resources... It is very clear that these donations are a form of investments by the foreign companies for trade-offs and for deals. This is nothing but crony capitalism of a highest order,” said Yechury.

Demanding a repeal of the electoral bonds, Yechury also suggested that corporates should be made to strengthen

democracy through a law for the purpose.

“....let there be law that defines a percentage of profit that must be given for strengthening of democracy and let this fund form a corpus which can form a system of state funding of elections. We see this in many Western democracies. And this is process of state funding of political parties for electoral practices would be more transparent ... We can work out a mechanism,” he added.

Protests over Padmaavat to continue: Rajput group

IANSS
Jaipur

Shree Rajput Karni Sena chief Lokendra Singh Kalvi yesterday declared that his outfit is the “real Karni Sena” and that its protests against Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s *Padmaavat* would continue, even as a Karni Sena wing whose Mumbai faction had declared it was ending its protest, did a U-turn in the evening.

Sukhdev Gogamedi, national president of Shree Rashtriya Rajput Karni Sena, told reporters that “whoever saw the film yesterday (Friday) did so on a personal basis and the person who wrote the letter (ending the protest) has been expelled.”

He also said that his outfit has called an emergency meeting of office bearers to take a decision on the film.

To a question about a sting operation of those who went to Delhi to see the film, Gogamedi said he will respond when the sting footage comes out.

Earlier in the day, Kalvi told IANS that his group is the “real Karni Sena”, and it has made the Bharatiya Janata Party pay – via its loss in the Rajasthan bye-elections – for not respecting the sentiments of the protesting Rajputs.

“There are many fake Karni Senas emerging in India. At present there are eight such entities operating in the country with vested interests,” Kalvi told IANS.

The Rajput leader, whose group has been at the forefront of massive protests against *Padmaavat*, said there has been “duplicity” in matters pertaining to Karni Sena’s functioning.

He stressed that there was “only one Rajput Karni Sena operating in India and I proudly say that I am the founder of that organisation”.

He also asked people to “be aware of such similarly named organisations functioning and operating in the market”.

The Shree Rajput Karni Sena has been protesting the Deepika Padukone starrer since its inception, claiming the film distorts history.

“We started the initial protests against the release of the film, which we still continue to do,” he said.

“However, the other duplicate Karni Senas are creating a dubious situation by releasing contradictory and fake news,” Kalvi added.

On the BJP’s loss in the Rajasthan bye-elections, the Rajput leader said: “Around 17 organisations have joined hands and declared that they will make sure that the BJP loses elections on each and every seat.”

“And we proved what we said. The Congress won with a big margin while the BJP was a loser on its home turf.”

“*Padmaavat* will decide many things in future.”

Kalvi said: “We want the government to understand via political loss how it has hurt the sentiments of people here.”

“We have hit hard on notes as well as votes. Bhansali was expected to get a Rs500 crore return, however, we scuttled his dreams and cut the profit margin to Rs150 crore.

“Similarly, the vote share of the BJP was reduced,” he added.

“I have met 21 chief ministers and am looking forward to meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi soon. I have got a call from the PMO asking about my schedule and have given them my schedule.

“Will see when can I meet him and brief him on the present situation,” Kalvi added.

The Rajput leader strongly denied having any political aspirations.

“None of us have any dream of floating a political party,” he said.

The Shree Rashtriya Rajput Karni Sena on Friday announced that it had decided to end the protests stating that the film “glorifies the valour of the Rajputs”.

Trade union protests against budget



Members of the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh trade union stage a demonstration against the budget near Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's residence in New Delhi yesterday. The BMS is affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the ideological mentor of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

BJP using Bofors to hide its failures: Congress

IANSS
New Delhi

The Congress yesterday accused the government of conspiring against the opposition party, saying the move by the Central Bureau of Investigation to reopen Bofors case was being done to “save itself from facing public backlash in the 2019 general elections” and to divert attention from its failures.

“The decision of the Delhi High Court in the Bofors case established how the Congress leadership, including (former prime minister) Rajiv Gandhi, was a victim of a smear campaign of the BJP decades ago,” Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewala said at a press conference here.

Hitting out at the BJP, Surjewala said: “The smear campaign of the BJP against the Congress was exposed in 1991 by the people’s mandate. And even after the death of Rajiv Gandhi the top courts exposed their conspiracies.”

The Congress leader was referring to the Delhi High Court ruling of February 4, 2004, giving a clean chit to Gandhi in the Rs640mn Bofors pay-off case.

The court in its order said that no convincing evidence has been brought before it to prove that he received any kickbacks in the Rs14.37bn deal to buy 155mm Howitzer guns from AB Bofors of Sweden.

Surjewala’s remarks came a day after the CBI filed an appeal in the Supreme Court challenging the Delhi High Court verdict acquitting Britain-based

Hinduja brothers – Srichand, Gopichand and Prakash Hinduja – of alleged corruption in the purchase of Bofors 155mm howitzers.

Targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government, Surjewala alleged that the “conspirator BJP government under Modi is indulging in cheap politics by using the Bofors issue again to divert the attention of the public from the real issues”.

“A failed Modi government is using such cheap tricks to save itself from being dethroned in 2019.

“They are indulging in cheap politics but they are not going to succeed,” the Congress leader said.

Surjewala also said that even Attorney General KK Venugopal in his letter said that there is no

evidence or truth in the case.

“Despite that, after 27 years of the death of Rajiv Gandhi, filing an appeal in the courts exposes the Modi government,” he said.

The Congress leader also termed the government’s budget announcement of a mega health service insurance scheme for the poor a “jumla” (fake promise) and said it was made without adequate funds.

Surjewala said the proposed National Health Protection Scheme was another programme of the Modi government and that its previous health insurance schemes have not brought satisfactory results.

“Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finance Minister Arun Jaitley have made health services to the poor a ‘jumla’,” Surjewala said.

He said two health insurance schemes have been brought by the Modi government and the proposed National Health Protection Scheme is now being billed as NaMocare by BJP leaders.

“Now in 2018 he has brought a new scheme on his own name. Modi have you allotted any money for the 2018 health scheme? The truth is that the government is fooling the people of the country,” Surjewala said.

The proposed health protection scheme is intended to be the world’s largest government-funded healthcare programme which will cover over 100mn poor and vulnerable families, providing coverage up to Rs500,000 per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation.

PM book gives tips on how to cope with exam stress

IANSS
New Delhi

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj yesterday urged students who are set to appear for their board and secondary school examinations this year not to compete with others but with themselves and that they need to learn from their mistakes.

Swaraj was speaking here on the occasion of launch of a book *Exam Warriors* written by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. “The book is the most relevant one in this exam season as it aims to instil confidence in the students and prepare them to face the difficult moments during examinations and life,” she said at the event.

She also described in detail the 25 ‘mantras’ for students given by the prime minister in his book and urged them to read

the book. The book is available on the ‘Narendra Modi App’ and students can communicate with the prime minister through it.

Describing Modi as an extremely good communicator, Swaraj said: “If students learn from their past and enjoy the present then they would be able to get a bright future.”

The book is a compilation of the prime minister’s address to students focused on busting stress during exams in his monthly radio programme Mann ki Baat.

“The students should compete with themselves and there is no need to compete with others. They should also use technology during preparation of examinations,” Swaraj said, suggesting that students should play games and practice yoga to overcome stress.

During her interaction with the students Swaraj mistakenly said “March me chunav ka

mausam hota hain (March is the time for elections)” and repeated the word “election” at least three times in place of “examination” – prompting the gathering to burst out in laughter.

However, she corrected it after realising the mistake, saying “We are leaders and election comes to our mind often.”

Human Resources Development Minister Prakash Javadekar, who was also present on the occasion, said: “This book will help the students in beating the stress. It is for everyone. Not only for students but also for their parents.”

He said that the book fits the prime minister’s call of “Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas”.

Urging parents not to put pressure on their children during exams, Javadekar said the prime minister will interact with the students on February 16 before the start of examination session.

‘Earlifting’ feat



A villager lifts a 60kg weight with his ears during the second day of the Kila Raipur Games, popularly known as the Rural Olympics, at Kila Raipur on the outskirts of Ludhiana in Punjab yesterday.

Singapore to hire Manipuri nurses

IANSS
Imphal

A healthcare group in Singapore has announced it will appoint 50 Manipuri nurses every year, to cater to the growing demand for nurses in hospitals and for home care in the country, an official said.

This was conveyed to a team from Manipur that had gone to Mandalay recently for exchanging views on improving business and tourism as a part of India’s Act East policy.

K Palin, managing director of Shija Hospitals, the largest private healthcare group in Manipur, said:

“The officials of the healthcare firm in Singapore conveyed to us that initially 50 nurses from Manipur will be appointed. After two years they will be promoted to staff nurses on

the basis of their track record.”

He quoted the official from Singapore as saying: “We want nurses from Manipur. First, they have similar physical features. Secondly, they can speak English which means that there will be no language barrier. Third, and the most important factor is that the Manipuri nurses are hardworking, friendly and are very sincere in their profession”.

“Since the number of aged patients who prefer home care services is increasing there is high demand for Manipuri nurses. Salary, allowances of the Manipuri nurses and other work conditions will be worked out,” Palin said.

Manipur is the second largest nurse producing state in the country. There are Manipuri nurses in all major government and private hospitals, clinics and private establishments in India.



CORRUPTION

**Bharathiyar University
VC arrested for bribery**

A top official of Bharathiyar University in Coimbatore was arrested while receiving a bribe of Rs3mn yesterday, officials said. In a statement issued in Chennai, the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) said Vice Chancellor A Ganapathy was caught red-handed while receiving the bribe. The DVAC has also booked Dharmaraj, a chemistry professor for aiding Ganapathy, 67. According to DVAC, Ganapathy demanded the bribe from T Suresh, an assistant professor in the Department of Chemistry to complete his probation. The DVAC said Ganapathy received Rs100,000 in cash and Rs2.9mn in post-dated cheques. The university is named after Subramania Bharathi or Bharathiyar, a great Tamil poet and freedom fighter.

CRACKDOWN

**Himachal Pradesh to seal
unauthorised buildings**

The Himachal Pradesh government yesterday amended the Himachal Pradesh Town and Country Planning rules, 2018 to allow sealing of unauthorised buildings. The buildings would be sealed after giving the defaulters an opportunity of being heard, a government spokesperson said. This will give relief to hoteliers as their objections will be invited now. The decision was taken at a meeting of the cabinet presided over by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur in Dharamsala town. The cabinet also approved giving interim relief to the regular government employees, pensioners, and family pensioners at the rate of 6% of the basic pay effective from January 1, 2016. This will put a burden of Rs7bn on the state exchequer.

APPEAL

**Maharashtra governor calls
for university of filmmaking**

Maharashtra Governor C V Rao yesterday called for setting up a full-fledged university dedicated to filmmaking and dedicated channels to air the vast treasure of documentaries, short and animated films. Mumbai is not just the commercial capital of India but also the film capital, therefore, the city should have a full-fledged university dedicated to various aspects of filmmaking, he said. Rao also urged the Films Division to work closely with the Mass Communications Departments of all the 20 universities in Maharashtra and the need for a dedicated television channel to screen documentary, short and animated films. He was speaking at the valedictory function of the Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF-2018).

BREAKTHROUGH

**Missing Telangana cop
traced in Andhra Pradesh**

A police officer of Telangana probing two sensational murder cases and who had gone 'missing' was traced in Andhra Pradesh yesterday. M Venkateswarlu, circle inspector in Nalgonda, was found in Bapatla town of Nalgonda district in the neighbouring state. Inspector General of Police Stephen Ravindra told reporters that the inspector was safe and a police team had left for Bapatla to bring him back. Venkateswarlu disappeared after leaving his weapon and official mobile phone at the police station on Friday. His personal mobile phone was also switched off and efforts by senior officials to reach him proved futile. Venkateswarlu was probing two sensational cases including the murder of the husband of Nalgonda municipal chairperson Boddupally Lakshmi belonging to the opposition Congress.

REACTION

**Violence erupts after two
die in traffic accident**

Two college students were killed when a bus hit them after ignoring a traffic signal in Kolkata yesterday, leading to clashes between locals and police. The accident occurred at the Chingrighata crossing on the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass around 11.45am. The driver was arrested, a police officer said. After the accident, angry locals residents pelted police with stones and torched four buses, accusing the police of not controlling the traffic well and instead demanding money from several vehicles. Stones were hurled at police vehicles and a fire tender that was sent there to put out the blaze. Police lobbed teargas shells and baton-charged the mob to disperse them. "We have been talking to local people to bring the situation under control," a police officer said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi looks on as Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay talks to Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal at the Advantage Assam - Global Investors Summit in Guwahati yesterday. Also seen are central ministers Ravi Shankar Prasad and Suresh Prabhu.

Northeast at heart of India's 'Act East Policy,' says Modi

IANs

Guwahati

Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday inaugurated the two-day Global Investment Summit in Guwahati, a first of its kind initiative in the northeast, and said a new terminal being constructed at Guwahati airport would boost the region's connectivity with Asean countries.

Addressing the event, being held at the Sarusojai Stadium in Guwahati, the prime minister expressed his happiness that Bangladesh and Bhutan have opened their consulate offices in Guwahati and said the northeast is at the heart of India's 'Act East Policy'.

Modi said the initiatives taken by the Bharatiya Janata Party government for the last three-and-a-half years "are becoming evident" and that his government had spent Rs53bn every year in northeastern states to improve the railway network.

"Rs4,700 crore was allocated to extend railway connectivity to 15 new destinations. When the Agartala (Tripura)-Akhaura (Bangladesh) railway connectivity becomes a reality in the near future, the whole region will be benefited," said Modi.

He said the tagline of the summit - 'Advantage Assam: India's expressway to Asean' - is very appropriate and not just a statement but it is a "comprehensive vision".

"We created the Act East Policy and the Northeast is at the heart of it. The Act East Policy requires increased people-to-people contact, trade ties and other relations with countries on India's east, particularly Asean countries," Modi said.

"Our vision is development of the eastern part of India, as the country's fast pace of development will only be effective when the people living in the northeast develop," he said.

Modi said that roads and railways are being constructed at a faster pace in the northeast and

electricity is being generated at a similar pace.

The summit, a first of its kind two-day initiative, is expected to see the participation of top industrialists of the country including Ratan Tata and Mukesh Ambani.

The summit is likely to see the participation of over 5,000 delegates from across the world, including Asean countries.

Officials said that over 250 deals worth Rs600bn are expected to be signed on the first day of the summit.

Other top industrialists expected to participate include Anand Burman (Dabur), Subhash Chandra (Essel Group and ZEE), Amar Abrol (Air Asia India), Rashesh Shah (Edelweiss), Sushil Goenka (Emami Group), Sanjiv Puri (ITC Limited), Harshavardhan Neotia (Ambuja Neotia Cements), and Balakrishnan Goenka (Welspun Group). Nareshtrehan (Medanta-The Medicity) and filmmaker Subhash Ghai are also expected to attend.

Business seminars on 12 focus sectors will be held on both days including Agriculture and Food Processing - Organic Cultivation and Bamboo, Handloom, Textile and Handicrafts, Logistics, River Transport and Port Township, IT and ITes, Pharmaceutical and Medical Equipment, Plastics and Petrochemicals, Power, Tourism, Hospitality and Wellness, Civil Aviation, Petroleum and Natural Gas and Startups Innovation.

"Investments in our promising sectors are key to the economic growth of the state. The objective is also to position Assam as India's Expressway to Asean. The summit is based on the core principles of the Act East Policy," Assam Industry Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary said yesterday.

Several central ministers including Nitin Gadkari, Suresh Prabhu, Ravi Shankar Prasad, Smriti Irani, Dharmendra Pradhan, Jitendra Singh, Kiren Rijiju are expected to take part in the proceedings as well.

IANs

Bengaluru

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address a massive Bharatiya Janata Party rally in Bengaluru today that marks the conclusion of the party's 90-day 'Nava Nirman Parivarthan yatra' (campaign to transform the state) across the election-bound Karnataka, a party official said yesterday.

"Modi will address the rally at the Palace grounds tomorrow evening. Thousands of our cadres from across the state and people from the city will participate in the event," the official said.

Though the prime minister was scheduled to address the rally on January 28, on the conclusion of the three-month yatra that began here on November 1, it was put off till today, owing to other engagements.

"As the budget session of parliament was beginning on January 29 and the union budget was to be presented on February 1, Modi could not attend the rally last Sunday as he was busy then," the party leader said.

Tight security has been made for the rally at the sprawling venue in the city centre where the party is expecting at least 100,000 people to listen to Modi's speech.

"We have invited thousands of youth, especially techies and executives of IT and biotech companies in the city to personally listen to Modi's speech though it will also be telecast live on news channels and available on YouTube," the official said.

The party's state unit has

opened an online registration and is using social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to personally invite the youth, techies, educated class and prominent citizens to the venue, assuring them of seats.

"About 30,000 people from across the city have responded, expressing interest in attending the rally and to listen to Modi's speech. We hope most of them will turn up as elaborate parking facility has been made for their vehicles at the venue," added the official.

"We have invited thousands of youth, especially techies and executives of IT and biotech companies in the city to personally listen to Modi's speech"

In the run-up to the state election, due in late April and early May, the BJP conducted the yatra, criss-crossing nearly all the 224 constituencies of the assembly across the state after its national president Amit Shah flagged it off.

The yatra, held with a view to bringing the BJP back to power in the southern state on the plank of transforming Karnataka through development, was led by its state unit president and former chief minister B S Yeddyurappa and party's other state leaders.

Besides Shah, party's central ministers Prakash Javadekar and Piyush Goyal who are in charge of the BJP poll campaign in Karnataka, Ananth Kumar, D V Sadananda Gowda and Ananthkumar Hegde who hail from the state and the party's state leaders will participate in the rally and address the public.

As pro-Kannada organisations have withdrawn their call for a Bengaluru shutdown today seeking the prime minister's intervention in the sharing of the Mahadayi river water with Goa, the party's organisers are betting on a huge response to the rally from the public on a weekend.

In other developments, former Tripura BJP chief Ronajoy Kumar Deb has resigned from the party after being denied a ticket for the February 18 state polls.

Ronajoy Kumar Deb was the BJP's Tripura president for five years from 2001.

In his letter to state party president Biplob Kumar Deb, he said: "Since the party has decided not to nominate me from the Bagbasa assembly constituency (in northern Tripura)... I have decided to resign from the party."

Deb had written his resignation letter on January 27 but released it to the media yesterday.

Terming the resignation as "unfortunate and unexpected", BJP spokesman Mrinal Kanti Deb said he had joined the party in the early 80s and had worked a lot for it. "He should not quit the party over mere denial of party ticket."

The BJP is contesting 51 seats in the 60-member Tripura Assembly. It has left nine seats for its ally, the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), a tribal-based party agitating for the creation of a separate state containing Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council areas.

Meanwhile, the state BJP president claimed that around 1,635 supporters of the ruling Communist Party of India-Marxist and other parties joined the BJP yesterday.

Glasses worth Rs50,000 put Kerala speaker in a spot

IANs

Thiruvananthapuram

While the controversy over Kerala Health Minister K K Shailaja wearing spectacles worth Rs28,000 has died down, Assembly Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan has run into a similar row.

Documents revealed under the Right to Information Act show that Sreeramakrishnan has even more expensive glasses - priced at Rs49,900, which includes Rs45,000 for the lenses and Rs4,900 for the frame.

The costs of the spectacles of the two Communist Party of India (Marxist) leaders have been reimbursed by the state government.

"I found it difficult to sit in the assembly as I was unable to see properly and I had to often move my head to look from one side to the other," Sreeramakrishnan said yesterday.

"I also had trouble climbing

steps. So my doctor advised me to get a better pair of glasses and I did that."

The controversy came to light after media reports showed Kerala legislators claiming medical reimbursements running into hundreds of thousands of rupees.

When Shailaja's expensive spectacles and the medical reimbursement of her husband became news, they had a tough time defending it.

RTI activist V Binu said it is unfortunate that the speaker, who has to ensure clearing of medical bills of the 140 legislators, himself has not shown any restraint in spending taxpayers' money.

Kerala legislators are eligible for reimbursement of their medical bills and also for their immediate family members.

Also yesterday, the opposition Congress said the ruling CPM will have no option but to "reveal" the business deals of its party secretary Kodyeri Balakrishnan's son Binoy

Balakrishnan, who is caught in a Rs130mn fraud allegation involving a Dubai firm.

Senior Congress legislator V D Sateeshan said the onus is now on Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Kodyeri Balakrishnan to explain to the people what the business deal was.

"This is not just applicable to political leaders of the CPM as everyone who is in public domain is certainly responsible for all the deeds and actions of their family members, and none can absolve themselves of that. The public has to know what is happening as political leaders are expected to uphold morality in public life," said Sateeshan.

Trouble started for the CPM in general and Kodyeri Balakrishnan in particular after a three-page letter from H I A Al Marzooqi, the sponsor of the Dubai company, stated that he has started legal proceedings against Binoy for the alleged fraud.



Opposition legislators stage a protest against the assault on Kashmiri students in Haryana in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly yesterday.

3 arrested for assault on Kashmiri students

IANs

Chandigarh

Haryana police yesterday arrested three people for allegedly assaulting two Kashmiri students in Mahendergarh town in south Haryana.

"The guilty will be punished. The incident began over a minor collision of motorcycle of the accused. Three people have already been arrested," Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar tweeted yesterday after the issue was raised by his Jammu and Kashmir counterpart Mehbooba Mufti.

The police had earlier in the day registered a case following the alleged assault on the two students on the previous day. Aftab Ahmad and Amjad, students of the Central University of Haryana near Mahendergarh town, around 125km from Delhi, were discharged from hospital after first aid late on Friday night.

They were allegedly assaulted by local youth on Friday evening when they had gone to the mar-

ket. The Kashmiri students have alleged that they were assaulted without any provocation.

The case was registered under several sections of the Indian Penal Code for rioting, unlawful assembly, wrongful restraint and voluntarily causing hurt.

Mufti has urged authorities in Haryana to probe the incident and take action.

"Shocked & disturbed to hear reports of Kashmiri students being assaulted in Mahendergarh, Haryana. I urge the authorities to investigate and take strict action," Mufti tweeted.

Opposition legislators walked out of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly protesting against the attack.

National Conference (NC) MLA Altaf Kaloo said the students were "ruthlessly beaten up", creating fear among other students from the state studying there.

"The students have been beaten up because they are residents of Jammu and Kashmir. Our students studying outside are now planning to give up studies and return home," the legislator said.



Suicide bomber kills at least 11 soldiers

Reuters
Peshawar

At least 11 soldiers were killed and 13 wounded yesterday in a suicide attack near an army base in northern Pakistan, officials said, in a region that was once controlled by a local faction of the Taliban.

Attacks have decreased sharply in the picturesque Swat Valley but can cause alarm in a region where Pakistani Taliban insurgents took partial control in 2007, before being ousted two years later in a major military

operation hailed as an important blow against Islamist violence.

Swat was the first sizeable region outside Pakistan's lawless tribal regions bordering Afghanistan to fall to the militants.

More than 2,000 Taliban fighters have been driven out of the region, government officials say.

The Pakistan army's public relations wing said in a statement that the "suicide attack" in the Swat Valley took place at the "army unit sports area".

"The soldiers were playing volleyball in the evening outside the military base...when

"The soldiers were playing volleyball in the evening outside the military base...when a suicide bomber managed to blow himself up"

a suicide bomber managed to blow himself up," said a security official who asked not to be identified.

The match was also being watched by civilians, and the casualty count could rise as a large number of people had gathered in the area, he said, adding that wounded were being shifted to a

nearby military hospital.

The attack was claimed by the Tehreek-e-Taliban, also known as the Pakistani Taliban, in a statement sent to the media.

"God willing Tehreek-e-Taliban has started the process of revenge attacks," Taliban spokesman Mohammad Khurasani said in the statement. "Wait for more (attacks) to follow."

The military has been on alert for signs of a Taliban resurgence as it seeks to rebuild civilian institutions and win over the local population as a bulwark against radical ideology.

Since being chased out the

region, the Taliban have carried out revenge attacks against anti-militancy activists and attempted to extort money from business owners in a region where Pakistan has stationed more than 4,000 soldiers.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahid Abbasi condemned the attack.

"No cowardly attack can deter us in pursuing our struggle against the menace of terrorism to its logical conclusion.

We will continue our fight till the last trace is rooted out," the prime minister said in a statement.



Nawaz Sharif

Witnesses to testify via video link in case against former PM

Internews
Islamabad

Two UK-based prosecution witnesses, including a nephew of an additional director general of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), have been allowed to testify through a video link in a supplementary reference against ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif related to Avenfield apartments.

Accountability Court Judge Mohammad Bashir yesterday accepted an application filed by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) seeking testimony of the owner of UK-based Quist Solicitors, Akhtar Raja, and principal at the Radley Forensic Document Laboratory, Robert W. Radley, via video link.

Radley and Raja, who is nephew of FIA additional DG Wajid Zia, the head of the Joint Investigation Team that had investigated the Sharif family, will record their statements through video link at the Pakistan high commission in London.

The judge also issued a directive for the installation of necessary equipment in this regard.

The two witnesses had earlier refused to appear in person before the accountability court, citing security reasons and other professional commitments.

NAB Deputy Prosecutor General Sardar Muzaffar Abbasi said that the witnesses were willing to record their statements through video link, but could not come to Pakistan.

He said that the personal appearance of the witnesses would cause inconvenience

and delay. Besides, he added, the authorities would have to bear heavy expense for their travel and stay in Pakistan.

He said the witnesses could not be compelled to come to Pakistan because there was no mutual agreement between the United Kingdom and Pakistan in this regard. The prosecutor also cited earlier precedents where the witnesses were allowed to testify through video link.

The counsel for the Sharif family, Amjad Pervaiz, however, said that the apex court had allowed testimony through a commission.

He argued that a reciprocal arrangement did exist between the two countries and read out its details from the gazette published in 1960 and cited by the apex court in a judgement in 1999.

He explained that the witness had to be made subject to a court's jurisdiction for his statement. As per the document, the Supreme Court Judicature, London, could examine the witness, he said, adding that by way of issuing commission, the court and prosecutor could examine the witness in the highest court of England.

In addition, Pervaiz said Radley had in his declaration about his terms and conditions before the JIT accepted that he could be required to attend the court for cross-examination, but there was no mention of video link. He said the family and antiterrorism laws had provision for video link, but the NAB Ordinance was silence on this.

Following the arguments, the court reserved its verdict for a few hours and later pronounced it by granting the NAB application.

China, UNDP sign pact to help crisis-hit Baluchistan and Fata

Internews
Islamabad

In a unique example of South-South collaboration, China and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pakistan signed a \$4mn agreement yesterday to provide assistance over four months in crisis-affected areas of Fata and Balochistan.

At the signing ceremony, Chinese ambassador Yao Jing said, "The successful launching of the project renews our commitment to deliver strong support to the people of Pakistan. The project will support the people in restoration of their livelihood and help rebuild their lives."

In future, China would continue to increase the grant assistance to Pakistan, enriching categories and sectors, expanding the input into areas with pressing demands, including Fata and Baluchistan, he said.

China is providing \$1bn to improve people's well-being and help the Belt and Road countries meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Chinese ministry of commerce has signed a co-operation agreement with the UNDP under the 'Assistance Fund for South-South Co-operation', and in November last year China approved funding for Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal to meet immediate recovery needs of crisis-affected populations.

The Pakistan-China recovery initiative for Fata and Baluchistan will contribute to meeting, among other goals, SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation).

Ignacio Artaza, the country director of UNDP Pakistan, said that Fata and Baluchistan were among the country's least developed regions and, in recent years, had been severely affected by disasters.

He said that Chinese support would help temporarily displaced families get back on their feet as they returned home after years of uncertainty, and help ensure that schools in Baluchistan meet necessary conditions to keep young students in school.

Punjab monitoring projects via geo-mapping software

Internews
Rawalpindi

The Punjab province government is monitoring development works via a geo-mapping software and the quality of work will be monitored by a committee led by the divisional commissioner, Punjab Human Rights Development secretary Asim Iqbal was told yesterday.

The provincial secretary was visiting the garrison city to review progress on development projects on the directives of the provincial government so the district administration will

complete work by the end of March.

Iqbal was briefed about the progress on development projects in the district under the provincial annual development programme during a meeting held at the commissioner's office.

The meeting was informed that work on 90% of the development schemes in the district has been started and the concerned departments have been asked to complete the work as soon as possible.

Deputy Commissioner Talat Mahmood Gondal told the meeting that 371 uplift schemes in the Rawalpindi district worth

Rs383mn had been approved for the current fiscal year and that Rs381mn have been released so far.

He said that after the completion of the tendering process, work orders have been issued for 371 uplift schemes. A scheme in Union Council Adiala was stopped on Lahore High Court orders.

Gondal said work in the development schemes will be completed in a month or two and that the concerned departments have been asked to speed up work but not to compromise the quality of work.

The deputy commissioner said that for the UCs of the district council, the government

had approved 150 development schemes worth Rs300mn in the current fiscal year.

However, 14 schemes have so far been completed, work on eight has been stopped due to court orders and 12 schemes in Murree and Kotli Sattian were delayed due to bad weather.

He said 85 development schemes worth Rs115m were approved for the Rawalpindi Municipal Corporation for the current fiscal year of which three have been completed so far.

He told the meeting that monitoring teams pay surprise visits to sites to check on the quality of work and conduct laboratory tests as well.

Solidarity ride



Cyclists pose for a picture after riding from Quetta to show solidarity with Kashmiris to mark Kashmir solidarity day, in Karachi yesterday. Pakistan celebrates every year Kashmir Day on February 5, to show solidarity with Kashmiris.

'Blue notice' issued to trace absconding top cop

Internews
Islamabad

As the efforts by law enforcement agencies to arrest former police officer of Karachi, Rao Anwar, have so far proved to be unproductive, the Federal Investigation Agency's Interpol wing has issued 'blue notice' to trace his location and activities requesting the member countries for their assistance in apprehending the absconder.

According to sources, the blue notices issued by Interpol had been sent to the Middle Eastern

and European countries seeking their assistance in identifying the former senior superintendent of police (SSP) and his location.

According to a senior official of the FIA, the blue notice is mainly issued by Interpol to collect additional information about someone connected with a criminal investigation and to find out his location or activities in relation to a crime.

The notice also requests assistance in locating friends, relatives or associates of an offender.

A blue notice can be issued prior to criminal charges being filed, whereas red notices are issued for the person who have

The blue notices issued by Interpol had been sent to the Middle Eastern and European countries seeking their assistance in identifying the former senior superintendent of police (SSP) and his location

been charged with a crime or convicted of a crime.

On the other hand, incumbent SSP (investigation) Malir Zulfiqar Mehar who had been assigned the task to arrest Anwar in Rawalpindi-Islamabad returned to Karachi on Thursday after the Supreme Court gave

10 days to the Karachi police to arrest him.

The former SSP is absconding in the case of extrajudicial killing of Nazeem Ullah Mehsud.

The FIA's cybercrime wing had been trying to trace the location of Anwar who had been making phone calls through WhatsApp since his disappearance.

However, the FIA has so far been unable to trace the location of such individuals who are using WhatsApp calls due to lack of modern technology.

The FIA investigators have been trying to find out the name and identity of the person whose Internet connection

is being used by Anwar.

The sources said that the FIA had alerted its personnel deployed on land route to foil any attempt by the former SSP to cross Pakistan territory through land route.

Anwar's name had already been placed on the exit control list on the directive of the Supreme Court after he had made an attempt to leave the country from Benazir Bhutto International Airport on January 23.

The sources said that Rao might try to escape through land route as his location had been found in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by intelligence officials.

Contempt notice issued to another minister

Internews
Islamabad

Just a day after sending Senator Nehal Hashmi to jail on contempt charges, the Supreme Court (SC) of Pakistan yesterday issued a contempt of court notice to Federal Minister for Privatisation Daniyal Aziz for his anti-judiciary speeches.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), meanwhile, denotified Senator Hashmi, who was sentenced to one month in prison with a fine of Rs50,000, about eight months after his outburst in which he had threatened members of the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) for probing the Panama Papers case against former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and the judiciary that had appointed them.

Aziz has become the third firebrand leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz after Minister of State for Interior Mohammad Talal Chaudhry and Senator Hashmi to face contempt charges for anti-judiciary tirade, though the court notice does not mention any specific contemptuous speech.

In the fresh notice, the SC asked Aziz to appear before it on February 7. It is, however, not yet clear which of the minister's statements caught the attention of Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar as the notice simply states that the chief justice

has taken notice of his contemptuous speeches.

Chaudhry, too, is required to appear before the apex court for his alleged derogatory and contemptuous speech at a recent public gathering telecast by different TV channels. He has been asked to appear before the court on February 6, a day before Aziz is required to appear on similar charges.

It is believed that Chaudhry's speech at the public meeting in Jaranwala in the presence of Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz drew the attention of the court that issued the contempt notice to him.

Earlier, while closing the proceedings and reserving the ruling on the contempt of court case against Senator Hashmi, Justice Asif Saeed Khosa had recalled how a five-judge larger bench of the apex court hearing the Panama Papers case had asked the government to submit the video clips and transcripts of Danial Aziz, Tallal Chaudhry and Senator Asif Kirmani. The attorney general office had already furnished the required material.

The PML-N leaders after each hearing of the Panama Papers case used to issue statements to the media outside the apex court building despite the fact that the SC bench had expressed reservations over their tone and tenor sometimes against the judiciary.



Marcos' lawyer seeks ban on Smartmatic services

By **Ma Reina Leanne Tolentino**
Manila Times

The spokesman of former Sen. Ferdinand “Bong-bong” Marcos Jr yesterday raised the need to ban Smartmatic Corp from serving as the country’s election service provider amid allegations of fraud and irregularities in past elections.

Lawyer Vic Rodriguez, spokesman of Marcos, said Smartmatic should not have been allowed to provide counting machines for use in the mid-term elections next year.

Former Metropolitan Manila Development Authority chairman Francis Tolentino revealed earlier that the Commission on Elections had renewed Smartmatic’s contract to supply vote-counting machines.

“I believe, now that Secretary Francis Tolentino has raised the issue, and it is only now that we have a no-nonsense and very strong political will type of leadership under President Rody (Duterte). I believe that this will be thoroughly scrutinised and we hope that Smartmatic will no longer be allowed as an election service provider,” Rodriguez told reporters.

Tolentino, presidential adviser on political affairs, had claimed that the deal between the Comelec and Smartmatic was highly irregular.

The Comelec has maintained



Vic Rodriguez holds a copy of a ballot that his camp believes was tampered.

that its decision to renew the firm’s contract was above board.

Comelec Commissioner Luie Tito Guia earlier told Manila Times that it is not true that the contract was signed in secrecy. Guia also said that the decision was made “after months of consultation with stakeholders, meetings with

the advisory council.” But Rodriguez said the contract should be set aside.

“We’re looking at a question to be raised before the Supreme Court to set aside that contract or maybe the Comelec on its own should meet again en banc and, you know, talk among themselves,” Rodriguez said.

The lawyer said their camp

is focused on Marcos’ election protest. Last week, the retrieval of ballots started in Camarines Sur for the recount of vice presidential votes.

Malacanang yesterday reiterated that President Rodrigo Duterte is keeping his hands off the election protest filed by Marcos against Vice President Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo.

In a press briefing in Ilocos Norte, Palace spokesman Harry Roque said Duterte has no intention to influence the Supreme Court, which will sit as the Presidential Electoral Tribunal (PET) to decide on the petition of Marcos.

“The president is a lawyer and he knows that there is what we call the separation of powers. The one that is hearing the election protest is the Supreme Court which is sitting as the Presidential Electoral Tribunal,” Roque said.

“So the president is keeping his hands off when it is not under his jurisdiction.

This is the mandate of the Supreme Court and we hope that the Supreme Court will do everything to resolve this election protest,” he added.

Marcos has questioned Robredo’s victory, saying that he was a victim of fraud.

Robredo won the vice presidential race by a slim margin of more than 200,000.

Earlier this week, Marcos showed photocopies of what he described as “shocking” and “highly questionable” ballot images from Camarines Sur and Negros Oriental, two of the three pilot provinces in his election protest.

In some of the ballot images, even though two or more candidates were shaded in the vice-presidential position, the votes still went to Robredo, instead of being considered “overvotes,” the former senator said. “We

discovered in some ballots that if the votes were for me, they were not counted and were considered undervotes.

So that’s why the undervotes for the vice presidency were high, more than 3mn.

But my opponent got the votes even if these were not supposed to be counted in her favour,” Marcos explained.

During the organisational meeting of the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee on the Automated Election System, Sen. Francis Escudero revealed to Comelec officials the alleged discrepancies between the main secure digital (SD) cards and the backup cards used in the 2016 national and local elections.

“I have records to show that the backup is not a mirror image of the main SD cards, a lot of them,” Escudero said.

Escudero made the revelation after the Comelec failed to provide the committee data that would show how many of the backup SD cards were used during the previous elections.

According to the senator, a backup card was supposed to be used whenever the main SD card encountered a problem.

The Comelec officials explained that they did not have the records because the vote-counting machines only recorded IP or Internet Protocol addresses and did not know whether the main or the backup SD card was used.

Govt set to probe frigate deal

By **Catherine S Valente**
Manila Times

The government is set to investigate the frigate deal between the Philippine Navy and Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) after the latter was banned by South Korea from participating in state-led bids for two years, Malacanang said yesterday.

In a press conference in Ilocos Norte, Palace spokesman Harry Roque said it is high time to determine the liability of the Aquino administration over the controversial frigate deal.

The pronouncement came after Rep. Gary Alejano of Magdalo party-list revealed that HHI, the winning bidder for the Philippine Navy’s frigate acquisition project, was involved in a bribery scandal in 2013.

“You know, the President is getting exhausted from defending contracts entered into by the past administration,” Roque told reporters.

“It is about time to investigate Congressman Alejano’s allies to find out what they have done in connection with this frigate deal,” he added.

On Thursday, Alejano said HHI executives were found guilty of bribing an official of state-run Korea Hydro and Nuclear Power Co, into choosing as supplier of parts for nuclear reactors to be exported to the United Arab Emirates. Alejano said HHI attempted to have the restriction nullified, but it lost in a 2015 trial. The South Korean Supreme Court, on December 22, 2017, ruled with finality to impose a two-year ban for HHI to participate in state-led bids.

Military arrests top rebel leader in Butuan City

By **Roy Narra**
Manila Times

An alleged ranking leader of the New People’s Army (NPA) was arrested in Butuan City on Friday, the military said.

Leonida Guao, the NPA’s alleged finance officer in Mindanao, was arrested for the crime of murder in Barangay (village) Bading. The warrant was issued by the Regional Trial Court Branch-7 in Bayugan City, Agusan del Sur.

The NPA is the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

Arresting police and military officers confiscated one pistol, 45 magazines, six rounds of live ammunition, one pistol holder, five blasting caps, and detonating cord.

Lt General Benjamin R Madrigal Jr, commander of the Eastern Mindanao Command, said the arrest of Guao proves that terrorists “cannot run away from the long arm of the law.”

“The arrest gave justice to the victims of their atrocities, particularly those indigenous people they brutally killed, the common people who have been victimised by their extortion and terrorist activities, and those who have lost their livelihood brought about by their arson and sabotage activities,” he said in a statement.

Guao was placed in the custody of the CARAGA regional police district for further legal processing. She is the second communist leader arrested since President Rodrigo Duterte cancelled the peace talks between the government and the rebel groups. On January 31, National Democratic Front (NDF) consultant Rafael Baylosis and his comrade Guillermo Roque were arrested in Quezon City for illegal possession of firearms and explosives.

The Philippine National Police (PNP) Criminal Investigation and Detection Group will file a case of disobedience to lawful order against the two after they

refused to have their mug shots and fingerprints taken.

They are being held in the PNP Custodial Center since no bail was recommended for their temporary liberty.

Duterte scrapped the peace negotiations with the communist group last year after the NPA launched a series of attacks on government targets. The decision to halt the talks came after the NPA ambushed members of the Presidential Security Group (PSG) in North Cotabato in July 2017.

Anakpawis party-list Rep. Ariel Casilao yesterday warned that the arrest of consultants of the National Democratic Front (NDF) may become a “vicious cycle.”

Casilao warned that the NPA may retaliate and abduct government peace negotiators.

“The arrest gave justice to the victims of their atrocities, particularly those indigenous people they brutally killed”

“If this will continue, the arrest of so-called temporarily-released-on-bail NDF consultants, it will reach a point, for example, where the NPA would also decide to arrest GRP negotiators and consultants. And this will be a vicious cycle to be repeated over again,” he said at a news forum in Quezon City.

The CPP-NPA has been waging a decades-long armed struggle against the government.

Casilao said the rebellion problem will not be resolved through military means.

“This will not be solved by the sheer might of the Armed Forces. Because the problem of insurgency is rooted in poverty. We have long been saying to address the problem of poverty,” Casilao said.

Several lawmakers from the Makabayan bloc in the House of Representatives have condemned the arrest of Baylosis, a consultant of the NDF in the scuttled peace talks between the government and communist rebels.

Mayon volcano alert level ‘may be lowered soon’

By **Rhaydz B Barcia**
Manila Times/Legazpi City

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) would lower from three to four the alert level for Mount Mayon in the next few weeks, if the volcano’s waning activity continued.

Ed Laguerta, Phivolcs chief volcanologist in the Bicol Region, yesterday said Mayon was showing low abnormal activity in the last 24 hours but no conclusive proof would support that such activity was weakening. Thus, according to Laguerta, Alert Level 4 and the eight-kilometre danger zone stay. He, however, believes that the volcano may still generate explosions as it did in 1984 when Mayon exploded after being quiet for a week.

“We are closely studying the sudden change and decrease of (sulphur dioxide gas emission) of Mayon to 1,583 tonnes per day from the more than 3,000 tonnes two days ago,” Laguerta said during a news briefing.

With Alert Level 4 in place, public have been strongly advised to not enter the eight-kilometre danger zone and to be vigilant against pyroclastic currents, lahars and sediment-laden stream flows.



Mayon volcano has been showing low abnormal activity in the last 24 hours, but there has been no proof that this activity is weakening.

Bulacan drivers urged to adopt modernisation plan

By **Frederick Silverio**
Manila Times

Department of Transportation (DoTr) Secretary Arthur Tugade and Bulacan Governor Wilhelmino Sy Alvarado met with the Federation of Jeepney Operators and Drivers Association of Bulacan in a bid to promote the Public Utility Vehicles (PUV) modernisation programme of the Duterte administration.

This was held at The Pavilion Hiyas ng Bulacan Convention Centre in the City of Malolos on Friday.

Tugade said it is high time to change the transportation system of the country that has gone from bad to worse and pleaded to the drivers and operators to listen and understand the programme, so that they can meet halfway with the

government. The programme, according to the DoTr secretary, is not being implemented to exterminate their livelihood but to help them improve the transportation system.

He said he dreams that there would come a time that even people in suits and barong will ride jeepneys because they are comfortable and air-conditioned.

Officials and members of the Bulacan Federation of Jeepney Operators and Drivers Association expressed their sentiments that the programme could affect their livelihood.

Tugade noted that President Duterte wanted the modernisation program to commence starting January this year and the secretary pointed out that the programme will drastically reduce air pollution caused by smoke-belching vehicles.

The drivers and operators

were also briefed on the government’s loan assistance to those willing to acquire vehicles compliant with the modernisation programme.

The government has offered possible beneficiaries a 6% loan interest based on diminishing balance, if they avail of the modernisation programme and inquiries can be made at Land Bank of the Philippines and Development Bank of the Philippines offices that are located in the province.

Alvarado said that micro, small and medium entrepreneurs like the jeepney drivers and operators can maximise the benefits in getting their loans.

To lessen the problem of sourcing capital to procure a compliant vehicle, Tugade advised the jeepney drivers and operators to form a co-operative so that they can easily afford the cost of modernising their

vehicles. Operators of compliant vehicles can go to the DoTr so that they can be endorsed to the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) to start negotiations about the fare increase that they are pushing, he said.

Alvarado appealed to the banks to find more ways to lower the interest of the loans that the drivers and operators would be able to afford. Both Land Bank of the Philippines and Development Bank of the Philippines responded, saying they will bring the matter to higher ups and see what else they can do to help.

Aileen Lizada, spokesman for the LTFRB, reminded the drivers and operators of the five points that they need to comply with during the three-year transition that include wheels, emission, hand brake, safe lights and uniforms.

PLEA

Senator’s call to hire more lawyers

Senator Richard Gordon yesterday called on President Rodrigo Duterte to appoint more lawyers to the Office of Solicitor General, to ensure speedy resolution of about 725,000 pending cases at the OSG, Manila Times reported.

Gordon learned about the lack of public lawyers during the public hearing conducted by the Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights on several bills proposing to strengthen the OSG. The OSG only has 267 lawyers but it has an estimated 725,000 cases, of which 374,420 are still active. “The president should appoint lawyers to fill up these vacant positions to allow for smoother service by the OSG,” Gordon said. The posts of State Solicitors I to III are to be appointed by the president. The OSG said there are a number of vacancies for these positions. Out of the 988 authorised positions for the OSG, only 721 are filled up. Gordon also urged the OSG to expedite the hiring of lawyers for lower ranking positions. “I don’t mind getting you high salaries and benefits but obviously, you cannot cut the 728,904 cases. You seem to be doing a good job but no one can cope with that caseload. You should hire more lawyers,” he said.



Maldives president resists order to free dissidents

Reuters
Malé

Maldives President Abdulla Yameen fired his second police chief in three days and the opposition said it feared violence, as the island nation was pitched deeper into a crisis caused by Yameen's failure to obey a court order to free jailed opponents.

Three days after the Supreme Court threw out terrorism convictions against Yameen's political opponents, his government yesterday was still ignoring international and domestic pressure to set them free.

The court dismissed cases against nine people, including former president Mohamed Nasheed, the country's first democratically elected leader, who now lives in exile in Britain and has been campaigning to have his political rights restored.

One of the others also lives in exile; the other seven are jailed in the Maldives' largest prison, on the island of Maafushi.

Hundreds of protesters have taken to the streets to demand compliance with the court order, and Western countries and international organisations have urged Yameen to obey it.

The court also ordered 12 members of parliament who had been stripped of their seats to be restored to the body. The 12 had quit Yameen's ruling party last year, and allowing them to return to the legislature would deprive him of a majority.

The crisis poses the biggest

threat to Yameen's control of the Maldives since he took power in 2013, defeating Nasheed in an election that Nasheed's supporters say was rigged.

Yameen has stopped short of saying he will not obey the court order to free his opponents. He told a party meeting yesterday he "did not expect the Supreme Court ruling at all".

"We've started dialogue with the Supreme Court. We've sat and started talking about difficulties or concerns the state has," he said. "We're working on making sure we can respect the court order in a way that doesn't cause any difficulties to the people."

He fired the chief of police on Thursday shortly after the court order was handed down, and yesterday he fired the acting police chief he had chosen to replace him.

The director of the Maafushi prison also resigned his post yesterday amid disagreement among staff over whether to release the opposition leaders, an official at the Maldives Correctional Services (MCS) said. An MCS spokesman was not immediately available to comment.

Hundreds of opposition supporters chanted slogans such as "Enforce the Supreme Court ruling" and "Defend the constitution" in a Friday night rally outside the opposition MDP campaign centre in Male, the capital.

The joint opposition said in a statement it was "deeply fearful that the government's refusal to implement the Supreme Court



Maldives police forcibly enter the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) camp to break up celebrations of opposition supporters gathered to celebrate the Supreme Court's decision to order the release of all jailed political leaders near the capital Male.

order could escalate to unrest and incite violence across the country."

The Maldives, an Indian Ocean island chain of around 400,000 people known to outsiders mainly as a tropical paradise for the tourists that provide most of its foreign exchange income, has experienced political

unrest since Yameen took power. Yameen is the half-brother of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who ruled the Maldives for three decades until losing an election to Nasheed in 2008. Yameen and Gayoom have since had a falling out and Gayoom is now aligned with the opposition.

Parliament Secretary Gen-

eral Ahmed Mohamed said that parliament intended to reinstate the 12 legislators as required by the court. He also said Speaker Abdulla Maseeh Mohamed had asked to cancel this year's opening session of parliament scheduled for tomorrow, citing security reasons.

The United Nations, the Unit-

ed States, the European Union and India have urged Yameen's government to follow the court ruling.

"We understand the situation is extremely tense," Rupert Colville, a spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told reporters on Friday.

Hossain takes oath as new CJ of Bangladesh

By Mizan Rahman
Dhaka

Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, a judge of the appellate division of the Supreme Court (SC), yesterday took oath as the new chief justice (CJ) of the country.

President Abdul Hamid administered the oath at Bangabhaban. Hossain was appointed chief justice barely three months after Surendra Kumar Sinha resigned from the post.

Hours after the announcement of the new CJ, Justice Abdul Wahab Miah, the senior-most judge of the appellate division of the Supreme Court who had been acting as the Chief Justice, quit his post.

Law Minister Anisul Huq told newsmen that the president appointed Justice Hossain as the new chief justice and he has the sole authority to make appointment to the post as per the constitution.

Asked why Justice Wahhab was not appointed chief justice though he is the senior-most judge of the Supreme Court, the law minister said such a question should not be raised as it's the president's jurisdiction.

"I can't tell you why Justice Wahhab was not appointed chief justice and why the appointment of the new chief justice was delayed because the matter is the president's jurisdiction," Huq added.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam welcomed the appointment of the new chief justice.

"Justice Hossain is a very prudent judge and a socially conscious person. He has delivered a number of good judgments in his career. I hope Justice Hossain will take the judiciary to a new height through his competent leadership," he said.

Lanka probes corruption at national carrier

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lanka has ordered a corruption investigation at its national carrier, including the controversial termination of a management deal with Emirates airline, the government said yesterday. President Maithripala Sirisena has appointed a five-member panel to investigate the financial transactions of Sri Lankan Airlines from 2006 to 2008, when the deal with Emirates was ended, a statement from his office said. Sri Lankan Airlines, founded in 1979 as Air Lanka, was profitable until the government of strongman president Mahinda Rajapakse, who ran the country from 2005 to 2015, kicked out the Emirates

management team. The deal was cancelled in 2008 after Emirates refused to bump fare-paying business class passengers to give the seats to Rajapakse's family, who were returning to Colombo from London.

A furious Rajapakse removed the Emirates-appointed CEO of Sri Lankan from his post and put his brother-in-law, who had no aviation industry experience, in charge of the airline.

Since then, Sri Lankan Airlines has sunk into the red, with an estimated loss of more than a billion dollars and debts of \$3.2bn.

Sirisena's office said he ordered the five-member panel to focus on the "termination of agreements between Sri Lankan Airlines and Emirates, including reasons and

ramifications thereof." Emirates paid \$70m to buy a 43.6% stake in Sri Lanka's national carrier when it was privatised in 1998 and had a contract to fully manage the airline till it was forced to leave. Emirates' share of the company was eventually bought by the Sri Lankan government. A criminal investigation is already underway into the airline's purchase of new Airbus aircraft at a cost of over \$2bn during Rajapakse's decade in power.

The mounting debt crisis at Sri Lankan Airlines has forced the new government to seek international partners to inject capital and manage the airline, but there have been no takers so far.

The move comes amid allegations that Sri Lanka's new government, which came



Sri Lankan Airlines .. facing turbulent times

to power January 2015, has been slow to crack down on corruption under Rajapakse. The government last week set

up special courts to investigate charges of corruption amounting to billions of dollars under the former regime.

Elephant kills top Buddhist monk

AFP
Colombo

A senior Buddhist monk died in hospital yesterday, a day after being attacked by an elephant at his own temple near the capital, police said.

Bellawila Wimalaratana, 77, was violently pushed to the ground by the tusker, but the mahout managed to prevent the monk from being gored, police said.

The monk was rushed to hospital but died a day later.

He was also a vice chancellor of a state-run university and becomes the first high profile monk to be killed by a tamed elephant in the country.

The elephant was gift to the temple by the government of Myanmar in mid-2013 and it had been named "Myan Kumara."

Elephants are considered sacred animals protected by law in Sri Lanka. Several Buddhist temples have pet elephants which are paraded at annual pageants.

Despite laws protecting them, about 200 elephants are killed annually by farmers who say they stray onto their land and destroy crops. About 50 people are killed in wild elephant attacks annually.

Sri Lanka's elephant population has dwindled to just over 7,000, according to the latest census, down from an estimated 12,000 in 1900.

Nepal sends feasibility report on transmission line for China review

IANs
Kathmandu

The Nepal energy ministry has sent the initial feasibility report of a cross-border transmission line to be constructed on the Nepali side to China, a senior official of the ministry said.

Nepal had requested China to provide assistance for the construction of the Rasu-wagadhi-Kerung (Geelong) cross-border transmission line during former Nepal prime minister K P Sharma Oli's visit to China in March 2016.

Dinesh Kumar Ghimire, a spokesperson of the energy ministry, said that they handed

"Once the Chinese side studies the report, there will be formal discussions regarding the project at the government levels"

the initial feasibility study report to Nepali foreign ministry on Sunday to deliver it to the Chinese side through the diplomatic channel.

"Once the Chinese side studies the report, there will be formal discussions regarding the project at the government levels," said Ghimire, also one of two focal persons designated by the Nepal government to negotiate with the Chinese side.

With the hydropower plants being constructed

along the proposed transmission line, Nepal officials said that 400KV transmission line has been necessary along the route to transform power for the hydropower projects being constructed and those which are about to kick off construction.

The energy ministry has selected the project for potential financing under the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative. The country had signed a memorandum of understanding with China to become part of the initiative in May 2017.

"We have proposed this project to the finance ministry to submit to the Chinese side for the potential financing under the Belt and Road Initiative," said Ghimire.

Britain's prince visits Lanka school



Britain's Prince Edward, right, meets with students of Sri Lanka's schools for the deaf and blind near the capital Colombo yesterday. The royals are in Sri Lanka representing the Queen during the island's 70th anniversary of independence from Britain on February 4.



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GULF TIMES

Fed rates unchanged, but expected to rise as 2018 moves on

The year may see further rate increases by the US Federal Reserve (Fed) although it kept the interest rates unchanged on January 31, noting it expects inflation pressures to heat up as 2018 moves on.

It was chair Janet Yellen's final meeting at the Fed as Jerome Powell, who was nominated as the new Federal Reserve by President Donald Trump, is already confirmed by the US Senate.

In a break from past practice, Trump opted not to nominate Yellen to a second four-year term. Instead, he chose fellow Republican Powell to head the US central bank.

The Fed, which raised rates three times last year and in December forecast three more hikes for 2018, expects "further gradual" rate increases will be warranted.

Analysts say the target range for the federal funds rate is 1.25 to 1.5%.

Inflation has picked up slightly since the middle of 2017 while remaining short of the central bank's 2% goal. The Fed's preferred price gauge, a Commerce Department index linked to consumer spending, rose 1.7% in the 12 months through December. Excluding volatile food and energy costs, inflation was 1.5%.

Powell is expected to hew closely to the policies embraced by Yellen, who spearheaded the gradual move away from the near-zero interest rates adopted to nurse the economy back to health and spur job growth after the 2007-2009 recession, a Reuters' dispatch showed.

Fed officials are hoping to keep a tight labour market from overheating without raising borrowing costs so fast that it would stifle the economy.

With a gradual pace of rate increases, policymakers want to nudge inflation back up to their 2% target, a goal they have mostly missed for more than five years. Even with a brightening outlook for global growth and Fed tightening, financial conditions continue to ease.

During Yellen's four years at the helm, US unemployment has fallen to 4.1%, the lowest since 2000, as she navigated the Fed away from its crisis-era emergency policies and inched interest rates away from zero.

Yellen seems to have used low inflation to maintain low interest rates that helped pull millions of more Americans back into jobs, and the Fed under her leadership began to pay more attention to labour-market inequality.

Notwithstanding this week's rout in the US stock market, investors have prospered during Yellen's time atop the central bank, figures show. Since she took control in February 2014, the Dow Jones Industrial Average has risen by more than 65%, data show.

As Fed chair, Yellen began the process of exiting from the extraordinary measures that the Fed put in place during the financial crisis and its aftermath, gingerly lifting interest rates from near 0% and slowly scaling back the central bank's big holdings of bonds.

She said gains in the labour market had begun to benefit "almost all groups in the American economy" and she expected the pace of wage growth to move up, but perhaps not dramatically.

Yellen will soon be joining a Washington-based think tank to continue her economic studies and particularly her analysis of the labour market.

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HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah, stressed the need for open dialogue as a means to end the ongoing Gulf crisis.

Defence minister: Saudi, UAE intended to invade Qatar

By Lally Weymouth
The Washington Post

Qatar's Defence Minister, HE Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah, visited Washington this past week to attend a strategic dialogue with US Defence Secretary James Mattis. Welcoming the Qatari Defence Minister was a way for US President Donald Trump's administration to tell Qatar's neighbours, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, that it dislikes the boycott against Qatar they launched last June. "It's gone on too long," said one senior US official who works in foreign affairs (although the president at first endorsed the blockade). The administration wants the Gulf states united to fight militants and contain Iran, instead of feuding with one another. HE al-Attiyah talked to *The Washington Post's* Lally Weymouth about the dispute, his nation's dependence on Iran and a possible rapprochement. Edited excerpts follow.

QUESTION: Didn't the recent dispute between Qatar, on one side, and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, on the other, begin when the UAE reportedly hacked into your country's computers and put out a false report that your emir had made a pro-Iran statement?

ANSWER: The beginning was an ambush. The only thing is, I don't think they calculated right. They thought they could strike hard and bend the Qatari people. But the people showed solidarity and became more resilient. We enhanced our bilateral relations all over the world. So, you may say that the plan failed. All their 13 demands.

Q: One of the 13 demands was for Qatar to stop backing extremism?

A: Yes. Out of the 13 demands, not a single one was a genuine claim. We are the only country who signed a memorandum of understanding with the United States to counter terrorism. We have teams from all concerned departments working together [with the

United States] almost on a weekly basis.

Q: Have you interrupted any terror strikes?

A: There are the hard operations and the programmes and training. Today we are flying side by side with Americans to counter terrorism —

Q: You are flying side by side where?

A: To Iraq and Afghanistan.

Q: And Syria?

A: [The coalition and Nato] are using our strategic airlifts. But we are facing problems, because the neighbours are disturbing the operation. The airways are blocked.

Q: Do you mean UAE airspace?

A: UAE and Saudi. They are members of the coalition. But with their embargo, they are disturbing the operation.

Q: Is this the reason the US is tired of the dispute and wants it to end?

A: This is not a way to counter terrorism. This operation needs a lot of intelligence sharing, and if you don't talk to your neighbours, how can you get information exchanged?

Q: How can the dispute be resolved?

A: The only way to resolve such a dispute is a dialogue, which we have been calling for since the beginning of the crisis.

Q: And they say?

A: They want to come with preconditions. We refuse the idea of preconditions.

Q: President Trump has offered to mediate, hasn't he?

A: Yes, he is trying. And I hear he will invite the GCC soon to Washington.

Q: The administration wants to contain Iran and fight ISIL (another name for the Islamic State). Reportedly, they find this dispute a distraction.

A: This is exactly the picture. If you want to have a sincere dialogue with Iran where both parties lay down their concerns and try to come to an understanding of the region ... the best way is to sit and talk.

Q: Isn't the administration

concerned with Iran's military activities outside its borders?

A: Absolutely. But how do we address this issue? There is the hard way, which will be a disaster, and then there is engagement and dialogue, which we always encourage.

Q: Your country shares a gas field with Iran. Do you have to have friendly relations with Tehran?

A: We have to have friendly relations with everyone. We are responsible for the supply of (an enormous amount) of the world's energy. We have to have a smooth flow of energy, and that means we have to eliminate having enemies.

Q: You have Turkish troops in your country. Were you actually afraid that Saudi Arabia or the UAE might invade?

A: I wouldn't say afraid. They have intentions to intervene militarily —

Q: Saudi and UAE?

A: Yes, for sure. They have this intention. But our relations with Turkey go way back before the crisis.

Q: But you seriously think the UAE and Saudi Arabia have intentions to invade? Today?

A: We have diffused this intention. But at the beginning of the crisis, they had this intention. They have tried everything. They tried to provoke the tribes. They used mosques against us. Then they tried to get some puppets to bring in and replace our leaders.

Q: They wanted to install a new emir?

A: Yes, it is true. They put their puppet, Abdullah Ali al-Thani [a relative of a former Qatari emir], on TV and said, "His Highness the Emir XYZ." ... Then, when their plan failed, they kidnapped this man, and he tried to commit suicide to get out of Abu Dhabi. They tried to seduce him, and he followed them for a while, and then they found a substitute for him, so they wanted to get rid of him. They have another one now.

Q: They now have another one who they are trying to make emir? What are you going to do?

A: They can't do anything. The Qatari people love their emir.

Q: Because of the boycott against Qatar, you've had to import much of your country's food from other countries via Iran's airspace, right?

A: Yes. Iran is the only airspace we have — they blocked everything else. Iran gave us a sea line so we could get our food — some of it comes from Azerbaijan, Turkey or Europe.

Q: How was your conversation with Defence Secretary Mattis? What was the headline?

A: The headline is that we have plans to take our military-to-military co-operation to another level. We are going to expand Al Udeid [the air base that hosts the US military] and build housing and increase the capacity.

Q: And Qatar is paying for this?

A: Of course. We are hosting them. At the same time, we are going to increase our exercises and training — most of our equipment is from the US. We will have the F-15s in a couple of years. We already have the C-17 and C-130.

Q: What do you think of the Russian presence in the Middle East, especially in Syria? And why are you buying Russian military equipment?

A: Russia has been in Syria for the past 40 years. I think they have interests in the region. The more we keep the instability in the region, the more we are inviting foreign players to come in.

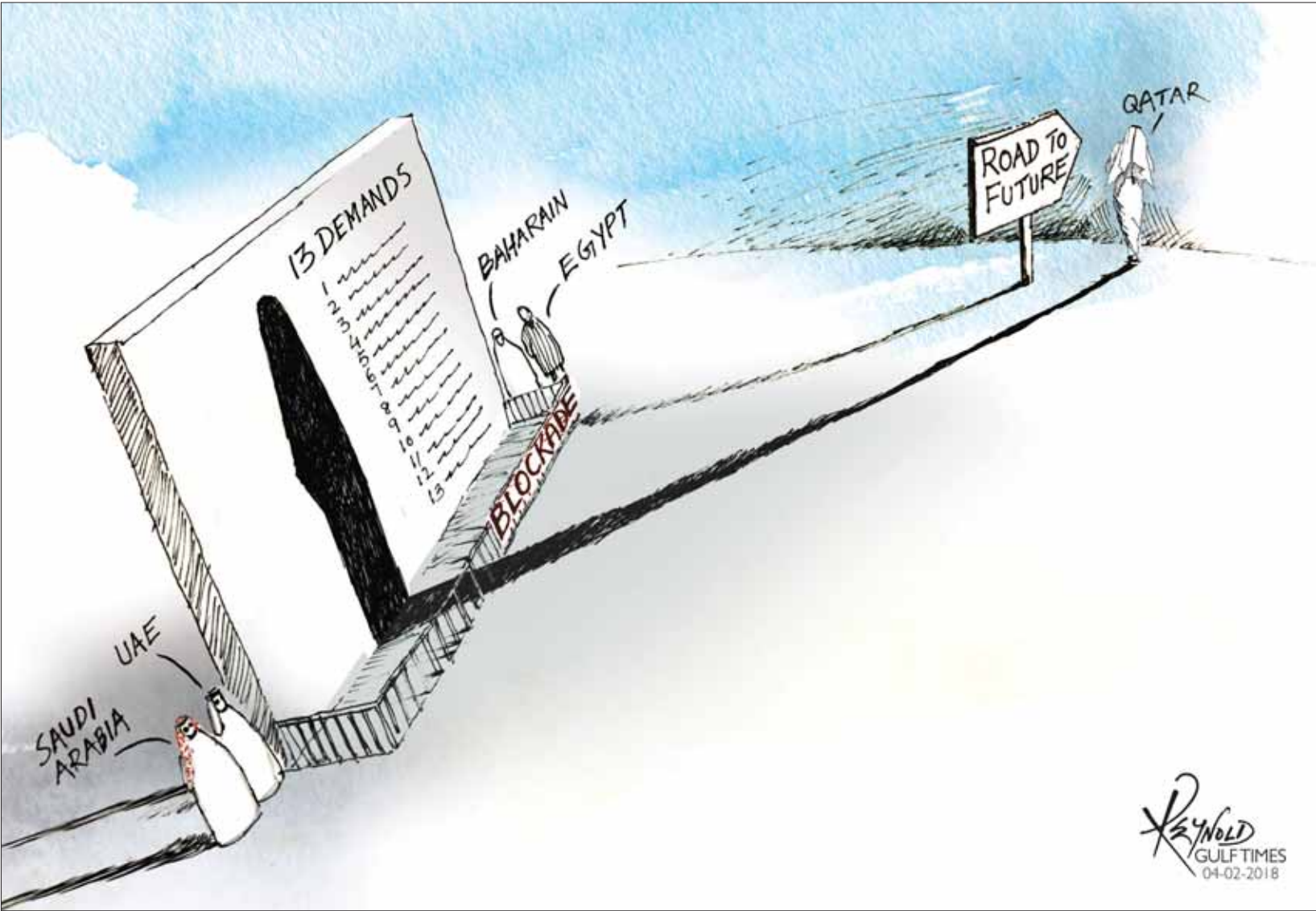
Q: In the past, your country has been accused of backing extreme terrorist groups in Syria.

A: It is false. Back then and today. This is a false accusation against Qatar. We have been concentrating in Syria on combating ISIL.

Q: And is that going well?

A: Yes, the ISIL operation is going very well. It is much better because previously when you pressured them in Iraq, they popped out in Syria. When you pressured them in Syria, they popped out in Iraq. We need to give the credit to General Mattis on this because he fought ISIL very well.

● Lally Weymouth is a senior associate editor for The Washington Post.



The point of sharp power

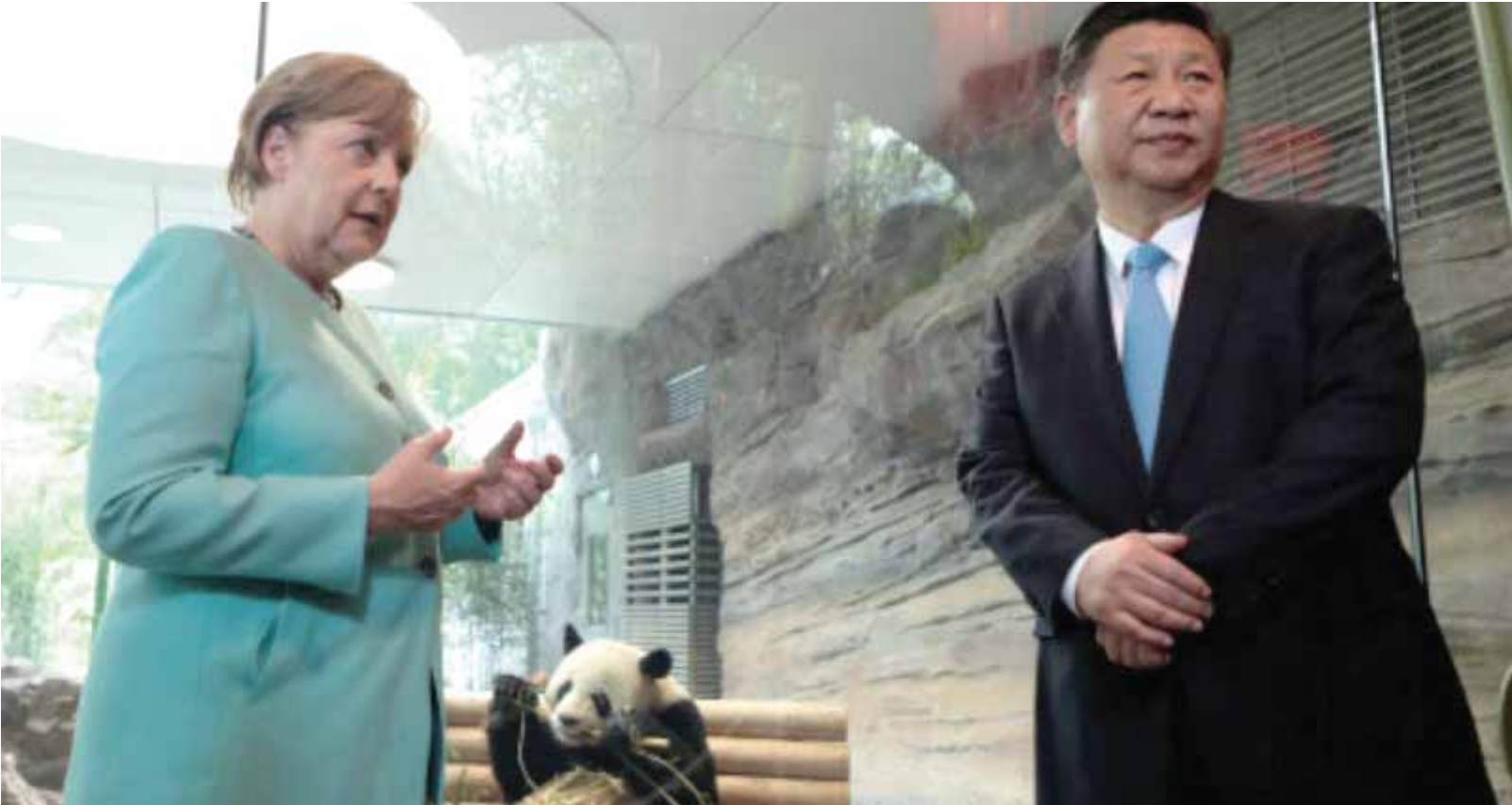
By Christopher Walker
Washington, DC

In recent years, Russia and China have poured considerable resources into arenas typically associated with “soft power,” a term coined by the American political scientist Joseph S. Nye and understood as the “ability to affect others by attraction and persuasion.” Either directly or through compliant surrogates, these two countries have devoted billions of dollars to increasing their global influence through media, culture, think tanks, academia, and other spheres.

Despite these immense investments, however, observers – including Nye himself – have scratched their heads, wondering why these authoritarian regimes continue to suffer a deep soft-power deficit, even as they have grown more assertive internationally.

Russia and China tend to do poorly in global public opinion surveys and indices of soft power, reinforcing the notion that attraction and persuasion are incompatible with authoritarianism. Internationally, autocrats are not “winning hearts and minds.” Nonetheless, Russia, China, and other well-resourced and ambitious regimes are projecting more influence beyond their borders than at any time in recent memory – and not principally through what Nye calls “hard power”: military might or raw economic coercion.

To be sure, Russia has used military force with some frequency in the last decade – in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria, for example. But Russia’s fighter jets and tanks are not driving Moscow’s global surge in influence. Similarly, China is flexing its military muscles in the South China Sea and along its disputed border with India. But, like Russia, China has been far more active



German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the welcome ceremony for Chinese panda bears Meng Meng and Jiao Qing in Berlin. China has a long tradition of deploying the adorable fuzzy bears as a form of diplomacy.

using other forms of influence over the last decade.

Theorists are therefore in a bind: these regimes are not relying chiefly on hard power, are unsuccessful at generating soft power, but are still able to project real influence abroad. Given the resurgence of authoritarianism around the world, it is an opportune time to reflect on this apparent paradox.

The *Financial Times* recently observed that in China’s “efforts to

build soft power outside its borders,” the country “needs to tread more lightly and take a more reciprocal and less authoritarian approach.” In a recent commentary, Nye makes the similar observation that “China could generate more soft power if it would relax some of its tight party control over civil society.” The same could be said of Russia and other countries with governments that prioritise state control over openness, independent

culture, and civil society – all of which are crucial ingredients of soft power.

But such exhortations to Chinese or Russian authorities are bound to fall on deaf ears. Any significant liberalisation would contradict these regimes’ own political needs and objectives to retain control at any cost.

The analytical trap is to assume that authoritarian governments, which suppress political pluralism and free expression in order to maintain

power at home, would be inclined to act differently internationally. These regimes have shrewdly adopted some of the forms, but not the substance, of soft power. What they pursue is better understood as “sharp power,” whose key attributes are outward-facing censorship, manipulation, and distraction, rather than persuasion and attraction.

While “information warfare” forms a part of the authoritarians’

repertoire, it is by itself an inadequate description of sharp power. Much activity undertaken by authoritarian regimes – whether it is China in Latin America, or Russia in Central Europe – falls outside of this definition, as colleagues and I detailed in a December 2017 report, “Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence.”

With hindsight, we can see the misconception that took hold at the end of the Cold War, when conventional analysis assumed that authoritarian regimes would liberalise and democratise. Nearly three decades ago, when the United States emerged from the Cold War as a global hegemon and the term soft power was introduced, political analysts did not take sufficient account of regimes like the ones in control of Russia and China today.

As my colleague Jessica Ludwig and I wrote in *Foreign Affairs* in November, “the democracies’ complacency concerning the evolution of malign, sharp power has been informed by their reliance on the soft power paradigm.” Analysts who view the authoritarians’ behaviour in terms of efforts “to boost their countries’ soft power are missing the mark and risk perpetuating a false sense of security.”

A sound diagnosis is necessary in order to devise an appropriate response. Authoritarian governments are not playing by the rules governing democracies. Systematic repression is the autocratic regimes’ calling card, and the “sharp power” they generate cannot be shoehorned into the familiar and reassuring framework of “soft power.” Without more precise terminology, the world’s democracies will have little hope of countering these states’ increasingly multifaceted influence. – Project Syndicate

● Christopher Walker is vice-president for Studies and Analysis at the National Endowment for Democracy.

Universities in the age of AI

By Andrew Wachtel
Bishkek

I was recently offered the presidency of a university in Kazakhstan that focuses primarily on business, economics, and law, and that teaches these subjects in a narrow, albeit intellectually rigorous, way. I am considering the job, but I have a few conditions.

What I have proposed is to transform the university into an institution where students continue to concentrate in these three disciplines, but must also complete a rigorous “core curriculum” in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences – including computer science and statistics. Students would also need to choose a minor in one of the humanities or social sciences.

There are many reasons for insisting on this transformation, but the most compelling one, from my perspective, is the need to prepare future graduates for a world in which artificial intelligence and AI-assisted technology plays an increasingly dominant role. To succeed in the workplace of tomorrow, students will need new skills.

Over the next 50 years or so, as AI and machine learning become

more powerful, human labour will be cannibalised by technologies that outperform people in nearly every job function. Higher education must prepare students for this eventuality. Assuming AI will transform the future of work in our students’ lifetime, educators must consider what skills graduates will need when humans can no longer compete with robots.

It is not hard to predict that rote tasks will disappear first. This transition is already occurring in some rich countries, but will take longer in places like Kazakhstan. Once this trend picks up pace, however, populations will adjust accordingly. For centuries, communities grew as economic opportunities expanded; for example, farmers had bigger families as demand for products increased, requiring more labour to deliver goods to consumers.

But the world’s current population is unsustainable. As AI moves deeper into the workplace, jobs will disappear, employment will decline, and populations will shrink accordingly. That is good in principle – the planet is already bursting at the seams – but it will be difficult to manage in the short term, as the pace of population decline will not compensate for job losses amid the robot revolution.

For this reason, the next generation of human labour

– today’s university students – requires specialised training to thrive. At the same time, and perhaps more than ever before, they need the kind of education that allows them to think broadly and to make unusual and unexpected connections across many fields.

Clearly, tomorrow’s leaders will need an intimate familiarity with computers – from basic programming to neural networks – to understand how machines controlling productivity and analytic processes function. But graduates will also need experience in psychology, if only to grasp how a computer’s “brain” differs from their own. And workers of the future will require training in ethics, to help them navigate a world in which the value of human beings can no longer be taken for granted.

Educators preparing students for this future must start now. Business majors should study economic and political history to avoid becoming blind determinists. Economists must learn from engineering students, as it will be engineers building the future workforce. And law students should focus on the intersection of big data and human rights, so that they gain the insight that will be needed to defend people from forces that may seek to turn individuals into disposable parts.

Even students studying creative and leisure disciplines must learn differently. For one thing, in an AI-dominated world, people will need help managing their extra time. We won’t stop playing tennis just because robots start winning Wimbledon; but new organisational and communication skills will be required to help navigate changes in how humans create and play. Managing these industries will take new skills tailored to a fully AI world.

The future of work may look nothing like the scenarios I envision, or it may be far more disruptive; no one really knows. But higher education has a responsibility to prepare students for every possible scenario – even those that today appear to be barely plausible. The best strategy for educators in any field, and at any time, is to teach skills that make humans human, rather than training students to outcompete new technologies.

No matter where I work in education, preparing young people for their futures will always be my job. And today, that future looks to be dominated by machines. To succeed, educators – and the universities we inhabit – must evolve. – Project Syndicate

● Andrew Wachtel is President of the American University of Central Asia.

Live issues

Nutritional immune boosters

By Barbara Quinn
The Monterey County Herald

I’ve been careful to wash my hands often and stay away from any hint of anyone who says they are not feeling well. Then I feel this little tickle in my throat...and a few random coughs here and there. Uh oh.

Welcome to one of the worst flu seasons on record, says the US Centre for Disease Control (CDC). Time to take a little defensive inventory.

Flu shot, check. Glad my employer required it early in the season. Flu vaccines stimulate my immune system to develop antibodies that can fight the most common flu viruses. The CDC advises most everyone six months of age and older to get a flu shot every year. Exceptions include people allergic to eggs or those with an illness called Guillain-Barre Syndrome.

OK, so the flu vaccine causes my body to produce antibodies against flu viruses. My job is to make sure my immune system has the right



There are some people who should not get the flu shot.

ingredients to manufacture those protective substances. That’s where nutrition comes in. When we consume foods that supply essential nutrients, we fortify our immune systems to search out and destroy disease-causing viruses (such as influenza) and bacteria that invade our bodies.

Protein is the key ingredient in the body’s strong army of defence. Protein in the food we eat – meat,

fish, poultry, eggs, soy foods, milk products, nuts and beans – is used to make the fighter pilots of our immune system. If protein is not in adequate supply, our body’s ability to resist bad viruses and infections is weakened. Immune boosting protein at each meal is a good goal for most of us.


Vitamin C helps stimulate the manufacture of immune-boosting antibodies, say nutrition experts. And

because vitamin C doesn’t hang out in the body very long, we need to eat vitamin C-rich foods every day to maintain a strong defensive line. Here are some good sources to mix and match into your daily meals and snacks: oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, yellow, red and green bell peppers, strawberries, tomatoes, guava, papaya, green and red chillies and salsa. Yes!

Zinc is crucial in the fight against invading viruses and bacteria, say experts at the National Institutes of Health. All aspects of our immune function, including the manufacture of virus-fighting protein, are dependent on an adequate supply of zinc. This high-ranking mineral is especially abundant in protein-rich foods of animal origin such as lean meat, poultry, seafood and milk. Zinc is also found in whole grains (look for the 100 percent whole grain label), beans, seeds and nuts.

As usual, the more varied the foods we eat, the better chance our bodies have to get an adequate mixture of immune-strengthening ingredients. Let the fight begin! – Tribune News Service

WEATHER REPORT



Three-day forecast

TODAY

Maximum Temperature : 23°C
Minimum Temperature : 15°C

MONDAY

Maximum Temperature : 23°C
Minimum Temperature : 13°C

TUESDAY

Maximum Temperature : 24°C
Minimum Temperature : 14°C

Fisherman's forecast

WARNING

Inshore : Nil
Offshore : Nil

WEATHER

Inshore : Hazy to misty on some areas at first moderate daytime temperature with scattered clouds, cold by night.

WIND

Inshore : Northwesterly 05-15 KT
Offshore : Northwesterly-Northeasterly 05-15/18 KT at places at times

Visibility


: 4 - 8 KM

SEA STATE

Offshore : 4-6 FT. Rises to 5 FT at places at times.

Around the region

	Weather today	Max/min	Weather tomorrow	Max/min
Baghdad	Sunny	21/07	P Cloudy	22/10
Kuwait City	Sunny	23/09	M Sunny	23/11
Manama	Sunny	21/14	Sunny	22/13
Muscat	Sunny	24/18	Sunny	24/17
Tehran	Sunny	07/01	P Cloudy	09/04



Around the world

	Weather today	Max/min	Weather tomorrow	Max/min
Athens	P Cloudy	17/09	P Cloudy	17/08
Beirut	P Cloudy	21/17	P Cloudy	21/18
Bangkok	Sunny	29/18	Sunny	28/18
Berlin	P Cloudy	02/-3	P Cloudy	01/-6
Cairo	P Cloudy	28/14	P Cloudy	29/15
Cape Town	Cloudy	24/17	Sunny	31/17
Colombo	S T Storms	29/24	S T Storms	30/24
Dhaka	Sunny	30/17	Sunny	29/17
Hong Kong	Sunny	14/08	P Cloudy	14/08
Istanbul	Rain	14/06	S Showers	09/06
Jakarta	S T Storm	31/24	T Storm	30/24
Karachi	Sunny	28/15	M Cloudy	27/13
London	M Cloudy	06/00	P Cloudy	04/1
Manila	P Cloudy	31/23	P Cloudy	31/22
Moscow	Snow	-3/14	Cloudy	-11/15
New Delhi	Sunny	23/07	P Cloudy	23/11
New York	Rain	07/1	Sunny	02/-3
Paris	P Cloudy	04/2	M Sunny	04/2
Sao Paulo	M Cloudy	25/17	Cloudy	24/17
Seoul	Sunny	-4/13	Sunny	-6/14
Singapore	P Cloudy	29/24	P Cloudy	29/24
Sydney	P Cloudy	23/17	Sunny	24/18
Tokyo	Clear	10/02	Clear	07/01



The 2018 Range Rover and Range Rover Sport are now on display at Alfardan Premier Motors showrooms. **Right:** An interior view of the new Range Rover.

2018 Range Rover models arrive in Qatar

Alfardan Premier Motors Co, the exclusive retailer of Jaguar Land Rover in Qatar, has announced the arrival of the 2018 Range Rover and Range Rover Sport in its showrooms.

Conceived nearly 50 years ago for the country set to use on the estate and then drive to the townhouse, Range Rover has continuously evolved to lead the world around it, remaining the peerless luxury SUV, while the new Range Rover Sport is transformed by technology, delivering efficiency, capability and performance like never before.

Every Range Rover Sport has an enhanced design and fea-

tures new consumer technology. The flagship Range Rover SVR now delivers 575PS, making it the fastest Range Rover to date. This is an SUV driven to another level of dynamic capability, with breadth of appeal and desirability like no other, according to a press statement.

Samer Bou Dargham, general manager for Alfardan Premier Motors, said: "We are hugely excited about the arrival of the new Range Rover and Range Rover Sport here in our showrooms and believe it will appeal greatly to our discerning customers who are very clear about what they want from any new Range Rover.

"After nearly 50 years, the fourth-generation Range Rover is the finest so far, ensuring the original luxury SUV remains the choice for discerning customers the world over. As for the new Range Rover Sport, it still maintains its sporting prowess but enjoys an evolving exterior design."

The exterior design of the new Range Rover has evolved, while heightened comfort and new consumer technologies have been added to the cabin.

Comfort-enhancing functions transform the travelling experience for the driver and passengers. The front seats feature 24-way movement thanks

to the new seat frames, with wider and deeper foams as well as heated arm rests. In the rear, a completely redesigned cabin and seating layout create a tranquil sanctuary with no compromise to the rear load space.

If one is working while being driven, up to 17 connection points - including domestic plug sockets, USB, HDMI and 12-volt - are all available, as well as 4G Wi-Fi hotspots for up to eight devices and convenient storage, all of which are designed for the business traveller.

Wider, softer seats offer sumptuous comfort, and the exemplary comfort extends to heated and cooled seats, plus

heated arm, foot and calf rests. All seat functionality can be controlled via a smartphone app, whether inside or outside the vehicle.

The elegance of the interior has been elevated by the seamless integration of the most advanced infotainment system yet created by Jaguar Land Rover. Touch Pro Duo, codenamed 'Blade', combines two high-definition 10-inch touchscreens on the centre console working in perfect harmony.

The new Range Rover has been enhanced with further technologies for greater comfort and convenience, such as gesture sunblind, air cabin ionisation,

pixel-laser LED headlights and activity key.

Meanwhile, in 2018, the Range Rover Sport's exterior has evolved to harmonise and modernise the design, making it look more dynamic without changing its character.

At the front, the striking new design is enabled by intelligent Pixel-laser LED headlights, sitting alongside a redesigned grille. This is complemented by a new bumper with a more aggressive profile.

Inside the cabin is the new Touch Pro Duo infotainment system, called 'Blade' by its developers.

In-car connectivity is en-

hanced with up to 14 power points, including a domestic plug socket to keep laptops and other devices topped up. The introduction of the Jaguar Land Rover Activity Key also brings new levels of convenience to the Range Rover Sport, allowing customers to lock and unlock their vehicle without the need to carry a key fob.

Other technologies gesture sunblind, advanced tow assist and Pixel-laser LED headlights.

The potent new SVR derivative takes the Range Rover Sport into new territory. Power is up to 575PS, delivering the 0-100km/h sprint only in 4.5 seconds (0-60mph in 4.3 seconds).



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*Terms & conditions apply.
**Down payment will vary depending on model.
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